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ABSTRACT

Ten papers discuss the relationship between cultural awareness and literature, with specific references to cultural resonances between East and West and between developed and developing nations. The papers represent seminar presentations of the Contact Literature Project in Honolulu in 1981. Contact literature refers to the study of literary expressions (e.g., novels, poetry, films) of the encounter between people of different cultural traditions. Subjects cover a wide range of cultures such as India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Indonesia, Tibet, Korea, and Vietnam. Specific topics include the role of women in modern Korean drama, the problems of how literature is related to a society and what kind of truth it reveals, the modernization of the poetic tradition in Sinhalese poetry, sociocultural aspects of two South Indian novels, U.S. films on the international scene, and some literary responses to America and Vietnam. (KC)

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CULTURAL REFLECTIONS

Papers from the Project
Contact Literature in Cross-National Perspective

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FOREWORD

All of the following papers deal with the relations between culture and literature, and with cultural resonances between East and West. Moreover, almost all of the contributions show something of the complicated processes of social change which were set in motion during the colonial period and which we still see reflected in the literature of many modern independent nations. The critics here, and the writers they discuss, are particular examples of the meeting of Occidental and Oriental traditions, and readers are invited to listen to the resulting dialogue, not only for its own sake, but with the thought that it will help them to bring to the surface their own cultural pre-dispositions in the appreciation and judgement of literary art.

The people involved in writing and assembling these papers were all in 1981 associated with the Contact Literature Project of the Culture Learning Institute at the East-West Center, Honolulu. This Project is in the charge of Guy Amirthanayagam. 'Contact Literature' refers to the study of literary expressions of the encounter between people of different cultural traditions. This is a field whose boundaries, to a large extent, overlap those of established areas of research such as 'influence studies' in comparative literature or the sociology of literature. Without pretending to a position of similar theoretical rigor as a discipline, 'contact literature' does constitute an area of cohesive interests the discussion of which is not always adequately provided for in existing academic structures. It is hoped that the following essays will serve to give the reader an idea not only of the theoretical questions relating to this approach to literary studies, but also a fair sample of the possibilities for creative investigation in this field.

The papers all come from seminar presentations, many of them by junior scholars, and some by people whose main professional expertise lies in other disciplines. This collection of occasional papers, therefore, makes no claim to offer the last word on the various topics treated. In many ways, the reader should regard it as 'work-in-progress'.

What is contained here is an unusual assortment of subjects in the sense that some of them are relatively uncommon for international audiences, and they collectively cover a wide range of cultures: India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Indonesia, Tibet, Korea, and Vietnam all provide focal points for the studies that follow. Another thing that may be of interest is that the papers possibly provide clues to the critics' cultural allegiances. There seem to be distinct styles of approaching literary analysis which might be attributed, in a general way, to cultural factors, so that we could speak, say, of a 'Sanskritic' (or 'Classical') method of listing definitions and precepts according to some set of abstract ideals; a 'French/German' (and, lately, American) method of erudite 'scientific' theory and exhaustive image-counts and statistical analysis; and a 'British' method of vaguer, integrative thematic generalizations made within a liberal-humanist framework. These three modes of critical response are, of course, vastly complicated in actual practice by all kinds of national, ethnic and social factors, but it may be that something of this further dimension of culture learning through literature is evident here.

I have been privileged to be involved in the stimulating exchange of ideas which occurred in the seminar series this year, and wish to record my special thanks to Reuel Denney and Andrew McCullough for editorial support, Greg Trifonovitch, Acting Director of the Culture Learning Institute, for approving the publication of these papers, and C.L.I. staff, Lyn Moy, June Sakaba and Beverly Toyozaki for their help in producing them in the present form.

P. S.
Honolulu,
October 1981

THE SENSE OF SELF:
Changes in the Role of Korean Women as Reflected in Modern Korean Drama

Shim, Jung-Soon

The impact of the Western civilization on Korean women in modern times is deep and extensive. Deep, in the sense that it brought about real changes to their sense of self, and extensive in that these shifts of awareness manifested themselves throughout society in the form of resistance and rebellion against the traditional morality. This paper aims at examining the growth of this sense of self as reflected in the female characters in some Korean plays written in the modern era.

About the time when Nora in Ibsen's A Doll's House (1876) leaves home in the pursuit of a more meaningful life as a human being, women in Korea, still bound by the Confucian ethical code characterized by the predominance of man over woman, were still required to make unilateral sacrifices. Bound by the "three virtues of obedience," and the "seven deadly sins," the role of woman was to take care of the household and to give birth to a son for the family succession. Changes, however, were on the way.

Domestically, the point of departure for the improvement of women's rights can be regarded as the Tonghak Revolution, which for the first time in the history of Korea permitted the remarriage of widows. But in terms of the intrusion of the foreign culture and its impact on the consciousness of Korean women, the most powerful momentum was generated by the introduction and acceptance of Christianity in Korea.

With the advent of Christianity, women were freed from the confines of women's quarters, and could attend religious services on an equal footing with men. The new doctrine taught that women possessed a soul as well as men and the Christian idea of salvation made no distinction on the basis of wealth, status, sex or age.

Above all, the schools established by the American missionaries provided equal opportunities for acquiring the new Western-style education. Thus, there appeared on the Korean scene the 'new woman'. Her sense of self, which was largely awakened by the new education, was first to be seen in rebellion against the traditional marriage and in the pursuit of freedom of love.

It was not until the 1910s when the forms of Western drama were introduced to Korea by way of Japan that this new woman appeared in Korean drama. The traditional dramatic forms like the mask dance-drama and the puppet play, with their standardized plots and stock characters, fell short of reflecting this social change.

The most common theme of the plays written in the first two decades of this century centers on the idea of freedom of love. Yun Paek Nam's Destiny (1919) explores this theme well by dealing with the ills of the 'photo-marriage' system popular at that time.[1] His play is set in Hawaii. The heroine, Mary, is a 'new woman' who graduated from Ewha school in Korea. Her father is a Christian evangelist who associates with many Americans, and worships things

Western without reservation. Believing that everyone living in America is both respectable and wealthy, he demands that Mary marry a man living in Honolulu, based on the exchange of pictures.

Mary has a sweetheart whom she has had from her schooldays. She agonizes over the conflict between love and the Confucian morality of obedience to parents. But she can not simply rebel against the traditional ethic. Moreover, she herself has "the vanity of yearning for the West." Eventually she goes to Honolulu according to her father's wish. But the bridegroom is nothing but an ignorant, poor, drunkard cobbler. There is no alternative for Mary but to live an unhappy married life.

One day, her former sweetheart, Suok, stops at Hawaii on his way to the mainland to study. He has a secret rendezvous with Mary, who pleads with him to show her a way to free herself from her miserable life. But Suok only tells her to find spiritual salvation. To this, Mary answers:

> Spiritually? Does that make sense? I have been torturing myself so far. Suok, spiritual salvation is nonsense when the body is dying. It is a crippled life. I don't agree with you. It is not convincing to me. I would find my life meaningful only when I find a place to transfer my soul and body together.

Informed of their rendezvous, Mary's husband rushes to the spot. A riotous scene takes place, and it happens that Mary, snatching a knife from her husband, drives it into him in spite of herself.

It is possible to observe in this one play that America, as an image that cannot be ignored, has already found a secure place in the Korean consciousness. This might be seen as a mixed blessing since it provokes Mary's overseas marriage as well as her self-assertiveness. Her secret meeting with the childhood sweetheart, her rebellion against an unhappy marriage and her rejection of an other-worldly spiritual solace are a far cry from the traditional image of the obedient and self-sacrificing woman. But Mary's agony derives from her inability to transcend the conflict between the pursuit of self-fulfillment and deference to tradition so that she fails on the one hand to fully realize a modern sense of self and on the other to totally reject the past.

Another play which seriously deals with the traditional marriage and freedom of love is Choe Sung Man's Dusk (1919).[2]

Sunjong, also a new woman, falls in love with Kim In Song, a married man, and in doing so, rejects traditional attitudes towards marriage and moral propriety. Sunjong speaks of the agony of the Korean woman bound by tradition:

> After all, our Korean women are too ignorant. And nobody teaches them. Sometimes I feel sorry that I was not born a man. I want to be as free as man.

Kim In Song married early, according to the wish of his parents, and now he wants to divorce his wife but faces the stubborn opposition of his parents. In Song argues his case:

> What I mean is that marriage should be decided by the persons concerned. Even parents have no right to say anything about this matter. If they can introduce and recommend a person, they don't have the absolute right to decide. As for my marriage, I did not consent to it nor decided it myself.

But the parents, who are imbued with the Confucian ethic, are unyielding. His mother says:

> Don't be absurd! How can one decide one's own marriage unless it is in the Western countries? It is impossible in our Korean tradition.

His father says:

> Divorce is something totally impossible. It is possible only when a wife has one of the seven deadly sins like disobedience to the in-laws, barrenness, unchastity, jealousy, incurable disease, verbosity, and theft. But this is not even my saying, but the teachings of Confucius. Is there anything culpable in the teachings of a sage? Therefore, except for these reasons, I can not consent to whatever you say.

In Song's wish for divorce is frustrated and he commits suicide.

The image of woman as a wanderer in between the traditional Confucian morality and new Western ideas, increasingly becomes that of someone who chooses the new morality, audaciously rejecting the old, and is more clearly projected in the plays of the 1920's. This awakened sense of self on the part of Korean women reflects the widening social horizons of the times when more and more ideas from outside were being introduced through Japan.

President Wilson's advancement of the concept of national self-determination sparked off the Korean Independence Movement, which eventually had an impact on cultural development. It awakened among the Korean people a modern sense of freedom and equality. This in turn gave rise to criticism of the feudalistic Confucian ideology which had ignored individual rights, woman's dignity and a flexible compassionate view of chastity and the freedom to love.

The heroine in Kim Yong Po's Poet's Home (1920) is also a 'new woman' leading the vanguard of the new era.3 She wears a western-style hair-do and gold-frame glasses. Her husband, Chungang is also sufficiently enlightened to wear a 'frockcoat.' According to their plan of making an ideal home based on the new enlightened ideas, Chunja leads the life of the Korea version of the 'lady', putting the household cares into the hands of a maid while she engages herself in playing the piano and reading novels.

But when her maid leaves without notice, Chunja's ideal suffers. To her husband Chungang, who advises her that she must not forget the duty of the lady of a house, Chunja says:

> Did you marry me to use me practically in cooking and drawing water from the well?

Chungang answers:

> That is what the educated women nowadays say. Chunja, you know better than to ask whether I took you as my wife to use you as a servant or not. If you who are highly educated cook meals for your beloved husband, how can it be a shame? It is never a shame.

Reluctantly led by her husband into the kitchen, Chunja wears gloves to keep her hands from getting dirty and accuses him of animal abuse when he prepares fish for cooking. Furthermore, she asks him to cook for her while she plays the piano.

Although Chunja's life-style of a Korean lady and the western idea of 'animal abuse' are presented in a distorted way, still this can illustrate that the sense of self manifests itself as the rejection of the traditional role of women restricted to housekeeping. But Chunja eventually reverts to an ordinary wife at the persuasion of her husband. She can not simply break the old values boldly and take the new ones in the conflict between tradition and modernity.

This conflict between the old and the new can be found in The Disillusionment of a Ragged Poet (1925) by Kim Wu Chin, the representative playwright of the 1920's.[4] Heroine Chungja is educated in a western-style school. She is a very liberated woman who smokes cigarettes, has once lived a bohemian life, and is always surrounded by all sorts of men. She is one that loves for love's sake and hence doesn't feel any qualms associating with Wonyong, a married poet.

Chunja even visits Wonyong's house to be introduced to his wife. Wonyong courts her love, mobilizing his poetic imagination. But contrary to his expectations Chungja flatly rejects his courtship. She says:

> People these days think it so easy to seduce someone else's wife as if it is to pick a flower from someone else's fence. But I don't betray my conscience. I am not so unfaithful to my feeling as to sacrifice my conscience.

Wonyong is disappointed at hearing this and calls her "new woman under the cover of old mask" and "vampire." After learning that Wonyong does not even allow his wife to go out without his permission, Chungja, referring to A Doll's House, advises his wife to "follow the example of Nora." Eventually, Wonyong and Chungja confront each other with their respective views of woman. Wonyong says:

> It is my belief that home is meant to be a prison. Once married, a woman loses her freedom as a human being. The eternal life of woman is right here at home.

To this, Chungja retorts:

> What kind of belief is that? Using woman in giving birth to a son, sewing up clothes, and cooking while you go freely around calling yourself a poet. Is that what a poet does? Sacrificing another's life while he himself sings a song in paradise like God. Is that what you are, you self-appointed bard?

Chungja rebels against the old values which demanded women's sacrifice only. She sympathizes with the new values and acts them out. But she, too, can not completely deny the Confucian morality, which is deeply ingrained in her, only to be "faithful to feeling." Here lies the agony of Chungja, a new woman at the initial stage of enlightenment.

As is seen above, women's sense of self at the early stage of enlightenment presents itself in drama in the questions of the traditional marriage and freedom and love. It also takes the form of opposition to and rejection of the traditional role of women at home.

Further momentum was provided for the growth of women's sense of self by the historic events of Korea's liberation from Japanese rule in 1945 and the Korean war in 1950. Throughout this period Korea became directly exposed to the influence of American culture. Liberation established Korea's national sovereignty on the international scene, enabling it to interact directly with other cultures. And through the Korean War, Korea was also exposed directly to the influence of the Western cultures introduced by the U. N. troops.

The image of women depicted in the plays written up until then is no more than that of someone who agonizes over the choice between the disparate value systems of the East and the West.

Ha Yu Sang's Daughters extol Free Love (1950) illustrates how the value system of women has changed since the inception of Western 'enlightenment.'[5] For most of the characters in this play, the American culture has already become a part of their life-style.

The father of three daughters of marriageable age is a professor. He is an enlightened man who married for love, despite his parents' opposition, when he was studying in Tokyo during the Japanese rule. The Korean students studying in Japan then were regarded as the elite.

But when his daughters choose to marry for love on their own account, he and his wife waver. The parents' opposition becomes more stubborn when their eldest daughter fails in her love-marriage. Their second daughter, Munhi, wants to marry Chunchol, a tutor to her brother, but her parents recommend to her a man with better qualifications—he is just back from study in America—as a potential bridegroom. Their third daughter, Myonghi, supports Munhi's stance, citing democratic principles.

Myonghi: The person concerned likes him.

Mrs. An: The person concerned may like someone out of a moment's whim, but it is her parents who should consider the future of that person.

Myonghi: But when the children have grown up, their free will should be respected in matters like love and marriage according to the democratic principles.

There exists a clear cultural gap between the daughter's generation and that of the parents. The daughters enjoy a more westernized life-style. They drink beer and whiskey, play tennis, dance the mambo. Even the name of their dog is Pace, an English name.

The father is not as modern in his views:

Dr. Go: You youngsters talk about love as if it is something fatalistic and absolute, but it is not. It is sometimes dominated by circumstances and chance. It is especially so in your sister's case. When she graduated from college and stayed at home, your sister felt very lonely. She must have been very anxious too as she got older. Accidentally Mr. Chunchol appeared on the scene and came to live under the same roof. It is natural that your sister fell in love with him. But your sister would have fallen in love with anyone even if that one had had worse prospects than Chunchol. No process of selection is involved in this proceeding. That's the tragedy of your sister and the same is true of all love affairs. I want your sister to open her eyes and realize her ability to make choices. Rather, I will make her eyes open.

But despite their parents' opposition, Munhi and Myonghi succeed eventually in marrying for love.

The attitudes of these three girls toward the question of marriage are different from those of the women who wandered between love and tradition at the initial stage of enlightenment. Here, they respond to this question with a more individualistic and independent way of thinking. At the core of this thinking lies the idea that passive submission to parents is no more the best filial duty and that one must not be interfered with by others in one's pursuit of happiness. To this new generation, marriage is a question the answer for which can only be the responsibility of the persons concerned.

Entering the latter part of the 1950s, women writers depict further growth in women's sense of self with an insight unique to women.

Kim Cha Rim's Whirling Wind (1957) deals with the story of three widows, covering three generations in one family.6 Grandmother Park is a widow whose betrothed died of a contagious disease. Assuming that engagement corresponds to marriage, she had come to live in her betrothed's family, and observed the three-year mourning as if she had been his wife. Then she adopted her niece, Mrs. Kang, as her daughter.

Mrs. Kang also became a widow after she bore one daughter in her marriage. Mrs. Kang's daughter, Kisuk, has become a widow too. Her husband was kidnapped and taken to North Korea during the Korean war.

Kisuk loves a widower, Doctor Hyonmuk, who has rented a room in her house, but grandmother Park strongly opposes her remarriage. Mrs. Park asserts that, once married, a woman should keep herself chaste for her husband even when she becomes a widow.

Mrs. Kang accepts her widowhood as her destiny. But Kisuk adopts a different attitude on this point. She believes that, rather than living in agony and anxiety, suppressing all the human feelings and desires, a widow should remarry in the pursuit of another happiness:

Kisuk: What's wrong with desiring a man? It is a natural and spontaneous desire. Why do you make a fuss over the talk of man?

Mrs. Park: Look at her!

Mrs. Kang: She is crazy.

Kisuk: You have lived with the image of man at the deep core of your hearts as if it were an idol. If you could not cut off that anxiety boldly from your hearts, why have you deceived yourselves?

Mrs. Kang: Aren't you afraid of heaven? You have a husband.

Kisuk: I am afraid of myself. Whatever efforts I make to suppress myself, it is not easy to control myself.

In contrast to her grandmother and mother, who tie themselves stoutly to traditional morality, Kisuk rebels against it. Her rebellion is aimed at the active pursuit of individual happiness and a meaningful life. Eventually, Kisuk breaks the old morality and explores her own life courageously by finding a second man for her life.

Another interesting character in this play is Aekyong, a college girl, who loves Hyonmuk. She is already engaged but boldly professes her one-sided love to him:

Aekyong: I'll tell you point-blank. If I had met you two days before my engagement, (sighs)...But I am going to break the engagement. I can not quench the flames of fire which are growing in my heart. (draws near him)

Her forthright offensive does not succeed. But Aekyong's confident, and active attitude toward the question of love makes a sharp contrast with the women at the initial stage of the enlightenment, who were wandering on the crossroad of the pursuit of self and deference to tradition.

When it comes to the 1970's, women's sense of self extends even to the question of sexuality. It is interesting to notice that for the first time in the history of modern Korean drama, equality in matters of sex became an issue for the women characters in plays.

The heroine in Park Hyon Suk's Masquerade (1976) makes up her mind to have her own pleasure outside of home as a retaliation for her husband's infidelity.7 He justifies his extra-marital affairs as follows:

> Calling it women's equality, they treat their husbands as if we are nothing. Can we men help leading a fast life facing that kind of treatment? Once women marry and give birth to a baby, they slacken up. It is really disgusting. When a husband makes desperate efforts to provide a living, even sacrificing his own self-respect to curry favor with his supervisor, all his wife does at home is to pose a challenge to such a husband. It is unbearable.

Seeing that women have come to demand equality even within the domain of the home, as this husband says, women's status has surely improved. The wife on her part speaks of her resolution to seek pleasure as her husband does:

> I have been so far a bird confined in the cage. But I will be liberated today. Yes, I will be liberated from now on.

Women's sense of self has become so strong as to demand liberation of sexuality. Thus, this wife attends a masquerade when her husband has gone away for days on a supposed business trip. Not knowing that her partner in the masquerade is her own husband, the wife drinks whiskey and dances. She even expresses sexual desire openly, although not without a sense of guilt. She says to herself:

> I want to go to a hotel with this person. He must have a handsome face under the mask. No, No. I should do my duty as a wife.

The play concludes with husband and wife discovering each other's identity. Being both embarrassed by their situation, they end by forgiving each other.

The heroine in another play by a woman writer, Kim Ja Rim's Flowery Pig (1970) calls for the liberation of sexuality as a means to rediscover the self lost in modern civilization.8 The heroine says:

> I feel nauseous in this too artificial environment. We've been trained since we were young how to breathe, how to walk and eat, and even how to make love. Sister, I want to run away from this overly specialized knowledge. This 'great denial' is struggling inside myself.

She has an extra-marital love affair and justifies it as follows:

> Sister, to set fire to the central heating system, I had to find thrills and the bizarre. To do so, I needed a love. So strong and even a cruelly strong one. That is a love which burns up my past, kills me for the moment. It makes me turn up. Then I return to my original self. I am baked fresh and new again.

This woman recommends an extramarital love affair to her older sister. Chastity is already an out-dated thing. She reminisces on her experience of the original self:

> He held me tight and laid me in the primitive forest. It was all green under me. His heart also was imbued with the green. Silence surrounded us. I felt with my small heart that excitement of being born again in this world. I, who tried to escape from the bounds of boredom and meticulous reality. That lawn, which I experienced in an atmosphere which made me feel like singing Hallelujah, was so much like the garden of Eden.

But this heroine also can not totally relinquish her duty as a wife and returns home:

> The reason I come back to this cage, pulling my divided self toether is that with that energy I can operate on the level assigned to me.

As is seen above, contact with Western ideas of democracy, women's equality and individualism exercised a great influence on Korean women in their awakening to a sense of self. At the initial stage of this cultural contact, women's sense of self was mostly expressed in the pursuit of freedom of love and passive rebellion against traditional marriage and their role as housekeeper. But coming to our time, women's enhanced sense of self does not merely remain at the level of inner rebelliousness, but becomes so active as to actually leave the home and demand the liberation of sexuality.

However, it is notable that the two women characters who try out extra-marital affairs do not totally forget their duty as the lady of a household. They can not free themselves from the sense of guilt which, in the case of Korean women, derives from the traditional Confucian morality. It remains problematical that while the women characters depicted in Korean drama resist the established morality and challenge the tyranny of men, they are not depicted as strong characters like Ibsen's Nora, who gives up her married life for a meaningful life as an individual human being.

NOTES

1. Yun, Paek-Nam, Unmyong (Destiny) in Hankuk Munhak-Taekyae, Vol. 1, Seoul: Hankuk Yonkuk Sa, 1976, p. 315. (All titles and excerpts quoted are translated by this writer.)

2. Choe, Sung-Man, Hwanghon (Dusk) in Changjo, February 1920. p. 9.

3. Kim, Yong-Po, Siin Ui Kajong (Poet's Home) in Hankuk Munhak Taekyae, Vol. 1, Seoul: Hankuk Yonkuk Sa, 1976, p. 282.

4. Kim, Wu-Chin, Tudogi Siin Ui Hwanmyol (The Disillusionment of a Ragged Poet) in Kim Wu-Chin Chakpumjip, (Yu Min Yong, ed.), Seoul: Hyongsol Publishing Co., 1979, p. 27.

5. Ha, Yu-Sang, Taldul Un Chayu Yonae Rul Kuga Handa (Daughters Extol Free Love) in Mipung: Ha Yu-Sang Huigokjip, Seoul: Taeyong Publishing Co., 1961, p. 228.

6. Kim, Cha-Rim, Tolgae Param (Whirling Wind) in Kim Cha-Rim Huigokjip, Seoul: Minjung Sogwan, 1971, p. 399.

7. Park, Hyon-Suk, Kamyon Mudohoe (Masquerade) in Hankuk Hyondae Munhak Chonjop, Vol. 56, Seoul: Samsung Publishing Co., 1979, p. 98.

8. Kim, Cha-Rim, Hwadon (Flowery Pig) in Kim Cha-Rim Huigokjip, Seoul: Minjung Sogwan, 1971, p. 449.

CULTURE LEARNING THROUGH LITERATURE:
The Uses of Fakes

Paul Sharrad

Let me begin by summarizing years of debate and research into the bold generalization that we have not only the experiences of individuals throughout history, but the consensus of opinion in the modern social sciences to prove to us that learning about other cultures is both a fact and a theoretical possibility.[1] The questions then remain: can we hope to cross cultural divides on a bridge of literature, and, if so, what are the peculiarities of such a bridge compared with personal encounter and empirical research?

Following the same sequence of questioning, we can cite straight away the fact that culture learning has always gone on through literature—especially so if we include oral tradition in our canons of 'literature'. We often forget that the supposedly isolated 'Dark Ages' saw a constant stream of contacts. The English court sent emissaries to India, the trans-Asia trade route flourished long before Marco Polo and Vasco da Gama, Brendan of Ireland, possibly a Welsh prince and certainly some Vikings went to North America, Egyptian and Chinese sailors appear to have made landfall in Australia, Malays settled Madagascar, West Africans probably settled in Central America and so on.[2] In all this, contact literature played an important part. The sacred and learned texts were carried as gifts, myths were shared and compared, reports of polity, commerce and custom were compiled for home consumption. Apart from these worldly examples, we have the well-nigh eternal and amazing examples of acculturation through religious literature, whether it be the Vedas, the Pali Canon, the Bible, the Quran, or the Confucian Analects. And too, for the Westerner, there has been a lasting tradition of encounter with ancient Rome and Greece through the learning of the Classics, a tradition that produced the European Renaissance, the development of vernacular literature and nationalism, as well as the various equivalents of the British Public School education which lay at the heart of Empire and which having been imposed on subject races, in turn led to the nationalistic cultural and political resurgences of the last fifty years. Indeed, we find the beginnings of a curious inversion whereby fact is born of fiction, science from art. Culture-learning through literature led Schliemann to his archaeological discovery so that historians, archaeologists, anthropologists, and linguists now sack written and oral literature with as much determination as the Greeks once sacked Troy.

Literature has always been, at the very least, an invaluable adjunct to culture learning and regardless of what literary critics say about the self-sufficient nature of art and the limited uses to which art can appropriately be put, books continue to be marketed and read because they offer not only enjoyment, but the opportunity of extending our knowledge and deepening our understanding of the world we live in. History teachers may turn to Restoration drama or Classical Chinese writing to give their students a feel for a particular period of national history; sociologists put Godan or A Man of the People on their reading lists to provide a sense of immersion in the values and habits of Indians or West Africans, and so on.

This use of literature as 'applied art' extends into our evaluation of writing on aesthetic grounds. Works that enable us to penetrate the surface of another culture, or even to more fully recognize our own, are often the ones which attract the most critical attention. (One wonders, for instance, whether V. S. Naipaul would have been awarded the Booker Prize if he had written solely about families in East End London, and ignored Trinidad, India and Africa?)

Insofar as art is a reflection of reality, this mixing of aesthetic and cultural appreciation is inevitable. One cannot analyze a haiku without coming to terms with a certain type of refinement of sensibility and with cultural patterns that select some elements of nature as having inherent symbolic significance and aesthetic value. Dramatic works, on stage or screen, provide insights into cultural priorities for behavior, reveal assumptions about what questions are the important ones in society, reveal patterns of appropriate and inappropriate action in human relations across class boundaries, and so on. Novels, with their relatively extensive and complex framework of time, place and action, offer, perhaps, the most complete opportunity for sympathetic immersion in a social fabric, with the associated satisfaction for their readers of feeling that they are coming to an understanding of a culture that appears more genuine than any tourist guide, or travelogue or statistical year-book can provide.

Literature, then, can be a valid medium for culture learning, with certain special qualities of its own. These qualities also create problems of how literature is related to society and what kind of truth it reveals.

If we cannot (having surpassed the ages of Realism and the engage writer) give our assent wholly to Sidney's dictum: "Poetry lieth not for it affirmeth nothing", we must still admit that the truth of literature lies in a different dimension than that of the sciences. Although even mathematicians nowadays are realizing that their laws and theorems are to some extent the result of the nature of the people who propound them and the situations in which they are formulated (rather than of some autonomous, externally observable reality or system of logic), writers have always been aware—more so than readers and publishers—that the worlds they create are at several removes from the reality which inspires their creation. When it is a matter of culture learning through literature, the levels of mediation between reality and the reader are especially important.

Beyond looking at what is depicted of another culture in a book, we have to ask how much of it is revealed, how it is depicted, why, and for whose benefit? Is the contact direct personal experience or through book-learning? Are the impressions of contact directed at those others contacted (Naipaul and India) or has the experience led to deeper realization of the writer's own culture (Orwell and Burma)? Is the writer inside the culture writing for outsiders or an outsider relaying information to his or her fellows? In the former case, is the work a translation and, if so, how does the particular bias of the translator (there must be reasons for choosing this or that work for foreign comsumption) affect the faithfulness of the translation and the image of the source culture projected?

At this point we should remind ourselves that there is no immutable undiluted 'real' culture, just as there is no fixed meaning for a text: we are looking at a set of relationships not a static object. (To use an example already cited, the transmission of religious texts from India to China and Japan not only modified the cultures of the recipient countries but produced—through 'creative mistranslation', or cultural cross-fertilization—important variants of Buddhist beliefs and life-styles). It may be that literature is an effective vehicle for expressing this complexity and flux, but in many respects we ought to be consciously working against authors, marketing procedures and traditions of criticism and teaching which tend to attempt to 'fix' a text into a number of categories of meaning, aesthetics and literary history, or into the provider of ultimate answers and insights.

We may need to ask of the text how it reveals the process of culture-learning through contact, how that process is reflected in changes in the characters, the writer's philosophy and craft, and how it can help us, as readers and learners, enter into the culture-learning process and realize the encounter with the 'other'.

If we define culture as a set of attitudes, values, beliefs and responses which result in a recognizable established pattern of social behavior, then we have to ask exactly how a character may be seen in the literary text to be *typical* of a cultural group. We must also discover how we are presented with this character's inner, and at times unconscious, cultural set, and how the character's individuality affects his or her stance with respect to the fictional social environment (and therefore to what extent the culture we see in the text is distorted). How fully, for example, does Bakha represent the sweeper class in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*?

The character is, too, a creation of the author, in response to some imaginative construct and to the demands of the genre with which the writer is working. To what degree is our perception of the character's culture shaped by the creative vision of the author, fuelled by some personal obsession or idiosyncratic philosophy of life?[3] V. S. Naipaul's Caribbean and African societies, for instance, are constantly tinged with his own bleak view of the post-colonial world, while Edgar Mittelholzer's images of Guyana's *Kaywana* history are steeped in his private preoccupation with blood and sex.

The other factor mediating between external cultural 'reality' and the reader's apprehension of it is language. If we disregard questions of translation and writers using a second language, and if we accept the creative capacity of language to overcome its inherent cultural limitations, we are still faced with the puzzle of how artistic considerations affect the ability of language to accurately portray culture to the reader. How does a writer's concern with literary or linguistic experiment affect our reading of the cultural content of the resulting product? Language is also the tool of extra-literary aspects of society: how much does it distort the picture given of a culture in order to fit in with political or social preconceptions of what that culture is or ought to be? (How does dialect, for example, exist to reinforce—or undermine—colonial, ethnic or national stereotypes in say Ayi Kwei Armah, Joseph Furphy, Wole Soyinka, Edward Brathwaite or Frank Sargeson?)

The main question we need constantly to ask ourselves when reading literature for cultural information is '*Whose* culture are we learning about?' The answer to this final question may well be 'nobody's.'—or, indeed, 'everybody's.' What emerges may be a purely literary construct based on general humanistic philosophical values. This we can determine to some extent with the tools of formal literary analysis—textual exegesis, structuralism, etc. The main thing to do is to keep before our eyes a large sign saying CAVEAT LECTOR ('Reader Beware'!).

Literary theory has sought to establish literature as 'Literature'—a discipline, if not a science, of its own—ever since Plato and Aristotle set in train the argument about the relationship between poetry and history. The result in our century has been to fence off the literary text, raising flags of self-determination and polemic about 'codes of language' and 'intertextuality' which need defer to no scientific big brother, or any external reality. (At a recent seminar on Deconstruction and Structuralism, the lack of a sociology of criticism was noted. Such a field might possibly record the coincidences between the post-war urge to national liberation, black pride, feminism, gay-lib, etc., and this assertion of literary autonomy.)

One result of placing the emphasis on the primacy and self-sufficiency of the text and "the systematic or totalistic explanation of language" is, as Malcolm Bradbury has observed, to suggest a fixed object rather than a process.

> The dominant tendency (of Marxism and Structuralism) is of course to see literature very much more as a cultural event, a written or performed text that emerges from a socio-mental structure and acts within that structure.

Bradbury properly reminds us that:

> Culture is not a matter of fact; it is a matter of social conflict and contending social claims.[4]

and one of the contributions of the culture-learning approach to literature is perhaps that of keeping the idea of process rather than product alive. Raymond Tschumi supports such a view when he points out that any language is constantly changing and that grammar ultimately is neither fixed nor rationally determined.[5] As we and our works are formed by our culture, so we and literature act upon that culture. The essence of literature perhaps resides in its ongoing dialectic between the work and the world: between the author and society, author and text, text and reader and so on. The culture we find in a book or poem is no longer the culture that pertains in the society from which it came by virtue of the very existence of that work and its original contributions of language, style and vision. The 'message' a work contains is somehow modified by our encounter with it.

Fortunately the theories of contextuality of language and such developments as Yuri Lotman's semiotic theory of literature seem to allow for this kind of dynamic complexity.[6] For, strictly speaking, culture learning through literature is a para-literary enterprise or a venture into 'applied literature'. As such, it involves us in considerations of authorial intention, social background, and readership which would by the purist critic be regarded as extraneous to our understanding and appreciation of the literary text. The work of art becomes a work of communication, a teacher of sociological information, not 'just' an aesthetic experience.

To illustrate some of the previous points (concerning the ambivalent status of the literary work as a means of culture learning and the para-literary nature of such an activity,--as well as, I hope, some of the significance this has for us) I want to look at a particular form of 'popular literature', namely the hoax: fiction masquerading as fact.

Tuesday Lobsang Rampa made his presence felt in the West following the publication of a book called *The Third Eye* in 1956.[7] This purported to be the autobiography of a Tibetan monk who, because of psychic aptitude, rose from the rather brutal monastic life of austere ritualistic Buddhism to become an adept of the higher universal mysteries of the occult.

I carry the subjective impression, from Australia at least, of the lurid covers of a succession of seventeen books regularly found in all sorts of unlikely retail outlets and in all kinds of unlikely homes.[8] These books are still in print and *The Third Eye* exists in four different editions, not counting its US publishers. For a while it seemed that the Tibetan monk had become the 'Raiser of the Eastern Veil', succeeding Madame Blavatsky and Krishnamurti, to be later displaced by Herman Hesse, Ginsberg and Guru Maharaj-ji amongst myriad others.

Book reviews of the time and many readers appear to have taken Lobsang at face value and dutifully gawped at miraculous forms of transcendentalism lost to the modern world and wilfully ignored by the West:

> There are unquestionably episodes which are apt to oxidize the brass-tack imagination of the Western mind, but the prevailing effect is credible and unassuming. Rampa's education...is bizarre but reasonable and filled with the normal promptings of children everywhere. (*Kirkus* 25:62. Jan 15, 1959)

> He has written a fascinating book...Very few books have been written by 'insiders', born and educated there, hence every such publication is of great interest. (*Library Journal* 82:670, Mar 1, 1957)

There was at least one suspicious reviewer. Guy Wint in the *Manchester Guardian* commented:

> Mr. Lobsang Rampa's book is rather a mystery. He claims to be a Tibetan lama who was trained in ancient medical knowledge and who has unusual clairvoyant powers. He cannot disclose his true identity because of endangering his friends and relations now under Chinese control. It sounds all a bit fishy.
>
> Last year an Austrian scholar sought in vain to find a lama capable of translating Tibetan medical texts. Mr. Lobsang Rampa's book is the more suspect because it has everything which the more simpleminded occultist could desire." (Nov 30, 1956, p. 9)

Soon after this, Tuesday Lobsang Rampa had his cover blown. *Time* magazine in

1958 showed a bed-ridden Charles Henry Hoskin and revealed how this son of a Devon plumber had suddenly 'gone Eastern', taking the name of 'Kuan Suo' and shaving his head.9 After he was fired from the vocational guidance bureau in London where he worked, he took to small writing jobs, finally submitting to his agent a manuscript on corsets and one on Tibet. He was told to stick to Tibet; advice which became worth $50,000 to him up till 1958 when The Third Eye had sold 30,000 copies, 12,000 in the US. Hoskin was unrepentant, claiming that he'd written the book in a state of possession by Rampa's ghost, and his publishers overcame their embarrassment to the extent of selling Transatlantic rights, publishing 16 more titles and illustrating the covers with broodingly spiritual faces bearing a remarkable resemblance to Hoskin himself!

There is some justification for continued sales of The Third Eye. It is a charming tale whose protagonist makes one think of Rudyard Kipling's Kim reincarnated as Teshoo Lama. The narrative is suitably fresh and childlike, full of naive repetitions of exotic bits of information, and there is an appropriate 'getting of wisdom' plot which makes the revelations of strange customs and wizardry the more credible. The narrator himself is both human and appealing, with his love of food and kite flying, his nostalgia for family life and his alternate moments of pride at his aptness and preferment over others and despair and chagrin when he makes a fool of himself and realizes what arduous tasks still lie ahead. His distaste for riding and his aerialist ambitions also make neatly worked-in links unifying the whole, and in the latter case provide a poignant image to round off the book in an ongoing cycle:

> In the morning, at first light, we set out. Slowly, reluntantly. Once more I was homeless, going to strange places, and having to learn all over again. As we reached the high mountain-pass we turned to take a last long look at the Holy City of Lhasa. From the top of the Potala a solitary kite was flying. (p. 256)

The overall structure shows an elegance of planning—chapters 7 and 14 on the Third Eye (creditably underplayed) with two lots of three chapters between loosely concerned with outside and monastic life, respectively. Three more build to Lobsang's final initiation, and there is a valedictory chapter to close.

Rampa has a gift for sketching in a scene and, of course, being always at the top of buildings and hills, he is able to indulge his descriptive talent. The reader is captivated by the rarefied, slightly melancholy, atmosphere of Lhasa, city of monasteries and mystery, and excited as well by the human bustle and the clutter of social observations accompanying the recording of the activities of the young reincarnated abbot. Even the skeptical Guy Wint admitted:

> Mr. Lobsang Rampa's book is...ably and eloquently written,10

--and the Times Literary Supplement went further in its praise:

> There is no doubt that this book was worth publishing, since though it would be a matter of extraordinary difficulty to say whether it is a work of truth, it comes near to being a work of art.11

This review explained how the publishers, not having direct contact with the author, submitted the manuscript to twenty readers in an attempt to determine whether it really was an autobiography. No one could decide. Perhaps even then a judicious bit of textual analysis would have made the avid culture-learner more wary than the ex-British diplomatic representative to Tibet who picked up Rampa on a couple of factual inaccuracies (there are no gold candlesticks in Lhasa apparently, and high-ranking men—not women—wear a large earring) which led to Rampa-Suo-Hoskin's exposure. The task is made a lot easier too, when we look at the second book, The Cave of the Ancients (1957).[12] In this Rampa has 'sussed out' the aura of his audience and is concentrating to a patently absurd degree on the 'golly-gosh' fantasties of occult lore. (His cave of the ancients—a storehouse of high technology and data-banks from a lost Atlantis civilization—I remember, formed the basis of an Enid Blyton (or was it Capt W.E. Johns?) adventure series novel I read in sixth grade and it has since been used by other 'great savants' such as the scriptwriter for "Planet of the Apes" and Erich von Daniken.) The appealing elements of the narrative in The Third Eye (the scapegrace darling of the monastery, the reluctant horseman, the ascetic gourmand and so on) are reduced to familiar props for the reader; mechanical and, finally, tiresome; pegs on which to fling a gaudy fabric of half-baked social ideas and psychic-scientific fantasy.

From the literary point of view, the eclectic gnosticism (claiming succession from the wisdom of Greece, Egypt, Rome, Atlantis and the South American civilizations) and the idea that every natural phenomenon was somehow rationally linked to "Akasic" magnetism and electricity points to Hoskin's reading of Blavatsky—another great hoaxer—since both are central to her "Secret Doctrine" and are specifically mentioned in the "Mahatma letters" to her disciple, Sinnett. (He also deplores the 'crisis' of Russia's expected invasion of Tibet, much as Rampa preaches against China's takeover).[13] The constant commenting to a Western audience on the strangeness of its customs seen from an Oriental viewpoint is highly reminiscent of William Hazlitt's famous essays on London society written in the guise of a Chinese visitor. And it is ironic that Hoskin was exposed by a British diplomat, since he obviously relied fairly heavily on the accounts of Francis Younghusband and Charles Bell's sojourns in Tibet. (pp. 183, 147, 210, The Third Eye)[14]

A close reading of The Cave of the Ancients, in particular, will show certain inconsistencies and improbabilities operating within the supposed cultural framework. While the narrator (now travelled, learned and settled in the West) is established as someone with a lively sense of humor and a ruefully ironic consciousness of his own youthful failings, the precocious youth of both books seems never to develop towards such a venerable adulthood. His force-fed training in medicine and the highter mysteries imparts little wisdom and decorum, so that he remains in the words of the Lord Abbot:

> 'The wild young man who falls over cliffs, greases the bottom of stilts and causes more commotion than anyone else here.' (p. 17, Cave)

There is a certain contradiction, too, in the airy dismissal of the lower orders of lamasery life, bound up in superstitious ritual and the human passions of the ego, and the expounding of a compassionate all-embracing

Buddhist philosophy. (There seems to be no continuum—despite the doctrine of learning through reincarnation—between the kitchen and the exalted realms of those few monks selected to keep alive the flame of true knowledge.) The exaltedly imperturbable lama Mingyar Dondup, Lobsang's guru, sagely expounds the traditional Buddhist doctrine of suppressing the passions:

> ...There is naught ever to fear other than fear itself. In casting out fear, then you strengthen humanity...(p. 136, Cave)

and then declares the necessity of fear in a rather Victorian way, emphasized by his repeated use of the analogy between life and a strictly disciplined schoolroom: (e.g. p. 194)

> Fear spurs us on when otherwise we would be slothful. Fear gives us added strength to avoid accidents... You would not study your school work unless you feared the teacher or feared appearing stupid in front of others. (p. 39, Cave)

Some of this double-speak is the inevitable rhetoric of the enthusiastic proselytizer who attempts to be broadminded, understanding and reasonable, but ultimately considers invalid every code other than his own. Rampa twists himself into knots over the idea of secret knowledge. He obviously revels in the thought and in his own role as pampered initiate, but cannot keep it to himself. He has his guru sorrowfully bewailing the wilful ignorance of the West and the evil of Communism as an excuse to keep from the world for its own good the knowledge that would make the world good (p. 47, Cave). Moreover, the entire series of books are predicated on the idea of learning, and yet in the crazed Japanese monk, Kenji Takeuchi, we discover a strong message against eclectic knowledge and travel.15 Of course, the writer, like his teacher, is not opposed to real learning:

> I am opposed, as are all thinking men, to those who obtain the brochures, the pamphlets and the books written about strange cults, about so-called occultism. These people poison their soul. (p. 74, Cave)

One other thing that emerges from attentive reading is the anti-communist obsession of the writer. We might understand a resigned sorrow in an emigre lama, but the constant and distorted fulminations against the Chinese and the "cancerous blight" of communism in general (p. 170, Cave)--especially in one whose tolerance is broad and who is unusually generous toward the Jews (p. 55)--bespeaks a personal animosity born of Cold War Europe rather than Tibet:

> ...This, our land, will be later invaded and physically conquered by a strange cult, a cult which has no thought for the common man, but exists solely in order to bolster up the power of dictators, dictators who will enslave half the world. (p. 47, Cave)
>
> The Japanese at their worst are gentlemen compared to the communists! (p. 228, Eye)

This failing rather calls into question Rampa's claims to clairvoyant powers and the accuracy of the prophecies in the Potala, since the monasteries in Tibet have been opened again by the communist government.

Along with this, there is the truly eccentric view of sex, which has all the tone and crankiness of the Hyde Park orator. Rampa and his mentors naturally view Western puritan attitudes as ludicrous and astounding, and present a reasoned spiritualist apology for the erotic art of the East. (p. 118, Eye) They go so far as to approve of abortion, and then roundly condemn artificial insemination as "one of the major crimes upon this earth"! (pp. 173-187, Cave) At this point, we should indeed begin to wonder whose culture we are learning about through this piece of literature!

As a vehicle of culture learning, The Third Eye at least is not without its merits. After that, we sense that the author has exhausted his fund of socio-cultural knowledge and has anyway hit upon a successful recipe of mystery and marvels which obviates any need for factual accuracy.

Rampa is careful—even clever—in his later works as well. He continues to throw in a 'local' expression every now and then:

> I felt like a badly tanned yak hide: soggy and limp. (p. 117, Eye)...as immobile as a yak stuck in a mountain bog (p. 28, Cave)

and even introduces inaccuracies of English expression:

> ...They had hurried up their footsteps
> ...to do a certain course of action
> ...or we shall be at logheads again (pp. 104, 117, 119, Cave)

Although we never get the impression of being inside his own mind as that of a foreigner in a strange land or of someone unconsciously acting out of a monkish and Buddhistic worldview, we do get a strong taste of a corporate reaction to the West as seen from outside, and of a collective or representative presentation of Tibetan attitudes practices and beliefs from the inside.

Look, for example, at Rampa's first encounter with a European:

> I was hard put to keep silent; I wanted to explode with laughter. A man, a tall, thin man. White hair, white face, scanty eyebrows, and deep-sunk eyes. Quite a hard mouth. But his dress! Blue cloth of some sort with a whole row of knobs down the front, shiny knobs. Apparently some very bad tailor had made the clothes, for the collar was so big that it had to be folded over. It was folded over certain patches on the sides, too. I thought that the Westerners must have some symbolic patches such as those we used in imitation of Buddha. Pockets meant nothing to me in those days, nor did folded collars. In Tibet, those who have no need to do manual work have long sleeves which completely hide the hands. This man had short sleeves, reaching only to

his wrists. "Yet he cannot be a labourer," I thought, "for his hands look too soft. Perhaps he does not know how to dress." But this fellow's robe ended where his legs joined his body. "Poor, very poor," I thought. His trousers were too tight in the leg and too long, for the bottoms were turned up. "He must feel terrible, looking like that in front of the Inmost One," I thought. "I wonder if someone his size will lend him proper clothes." Then I looked at his feet. Very, very strange. He had some curious black things on them. Shiny things, shiny as if they were covered with ice. Not boots of felt such as we wear, no, I decided that I would never see anything stranger than this. Quite automatically I was writing down the colours I saw, and making notes of my own interpretation of them. Sometimes the man spoke in Tibetan, quite good for a foreigner, then lapsed into the most remarkable collection of sounds I had ever heard. "English", as they told me afterwards when I again saw the Dalai Lama.

The man amazed me by reaching into one of the patches at his side and bringing out a piece of white cloth. Before my astounded eyes he put this cloth over his mouth and nose and made it sound like a small trumpet. "Some sort of a salute to the Precious One," I thought. Salute over, he carefully put away the cloth behind the same patch. He fiddled about with other patches and brought out various papers of a type I had not seen before. White, thin, smooth paper. Not like ours which was buff, thick, and rough. "How can one possibly write on that?" I thought. "There is nothing to scrape away the crayon, things would just slide off!" The man took from behind one of his patches a thin stick of painted wood with what looked like soot in the middle. With this he made the strangest squiggles I had ever imagined. I thought he could not write and was just pretending to by making these markings. "Soot? Who ever heard of anyone writing with a streak of soot. Just let him blow on it and see the soot fly off!"

He was obviously a cripple because he had to sit on a wooden framework which rested on four sticks. He sat down on the frame, and let his legs hang over the edge. I thought that his spine must have been damaged, because two more sticks from the frame on which he sat supported it. By now I was feeling really sorry for him: ill-fitting clothes, inability to write, showing off by blowing a trumpet from his pocket, and now, to make it even stranger he could not sit properly but had to have his back supported and his legs dangling. He fidgeted a lot, crossing and uncrossing his legs. At one time, to my horror, he tipped the left foot so that the sole was pointing at the Dalai Lama, a terrible insult if done by a Tibetan, but he soon remembered and uncrossed his legs again. The Inmost One did great honour

> to this man, for he also sat on one of these wooden frames and let his legs hang over. The visitor had a most peculiar name, he was called "Female Musical Instrument", and he had two decorations in front of it. N[illegible] I should refer to him as "C. A. Bell". (pp. 208-210, *Eye*)

Chapter Ten of *The Third Eye*, "Tibetan Beliefs", begins:

> It may be of some interest to give here some details of our way of life. Our religion is a form of Buddhism, but there is no word which can be transliterated. We refer to it as "The Religion", and to those of our faith as "Insiders". Those of other beliefs are termed "Outsiders". The nearest word, already known in the West, is Lamaism. (p. 134)

and it continues in this simple straightforward way with a presentation of basic doctrine and ritual relatively unclouded by the special pleading of the more exotic sections elsewhere. Considering the facts about the author and the preponderance of egotistically ethnocentric western travelogues about Tibet, this reversal of viewpoint is a remarkable achievement, indicating some very real cross-cultural encounters through literature on Hoskin's part.[16]

We, as culture-learners through his books, have to be careful though, as we have already seen. The "truth" of the literary creation is not the whole truth. Especially in the second work there is a cultural substratum which gives the lie to impressions of learning about Tibet. Essentially this is the comfortable, watered-down eclecticism of the occult popularist writer. Lobsang's monastic life is not a serious ascetic affair. He, as an adept, is free to miss out on services and meditation; he can sit down to a 'decent' meal and tidbits from India ("a sensible diet, none of the crank cult ideas"—p. 21, *Cave*) while lesser beings have to be content with tsampa and salt tea. Learning, for him, is a pleasant 'armchair chat' with the indulgent Mingyar Dondup, and everything has a rational, scientific explanation, in spite of the omnipresent tone of enlightened scorn towards western materialism. The overriding feeling that all this is *sensible* stuff presented in a no-nonsense manner enables the author, of course, to slip in bits of fantasy that appeal to gullible minds, but it also has the feel of a comfortable English livingroom rather than a Lhasa lamasery. 'For you, dear western reader, enlightenment without tears! You too can be the exclusive possessor of the secrets of the sages in the comfort of your own home!'

> My own personal opinion is that yoga is not suitable for western people without very considerable modification. (p. 228, *Eye*)

> It is a simple book in that there are no "foreign words", no Sanskrit, nothing of dead languages. The average person wants to KNOW things, does not want to guess at words which the average Author does not understand either!
>
> Too many people get caught up in mumbo-jumbo. The laws of Life are simple indeed; there is no need at all to dress them up with mystic cults or pseudo religions.

> Nor is there any need for anyone to claim "divine revelations". ANYONE can have the same "revelations" if they work for it. (p. 7, 'Foreword' to Cave)

As with Blavatsky's "mumbo-jumbo", the amazing thing about Lobsang Rampa is that readers continued to accept him as a teacher of culture and religion long after his unmasking. This is partly because any good 'mumbo-jumbo' contains enough truth to be plausible, and if it can enlist the credibility gained through fictional truth, so much the better for its exponent. It is also because of cultural preconceptions existing in the popular mind. Tibet acts as a symbol of 'the last unknown' and this hinterland, wherever it may be situated, is rapidly becoming the sole preserve of the transcendental-cum-supernatural. Tibet is the archetype of the High Places of the earth: the world-mountain, the supra-mundane keeper of mysteries, elusive and aloof.[17] Its feudal theocratic monastic society was the ultimate secret-society focussing on itself the appeal for the westerner of the masonic lodge and the religious sect. And as Raja Rao suggests in his novel The Serpent and the Rope, there is a long-standing fascination in the western psyche with syncretic gnosticism which finds a kindred spirit and formulated guide in the jnanayoga of India and Tibet.

Whatever we think of 'crank' religions and popular literature, these elements of our cultural psyche need to be studied, for as Edward Hall points out in Beyond Culture, we cannot be free of our cultural constraints until we become conscious of them.[18] The reverse side of the lesson such literature has for us is the revelation of the kinds of dissatisfaction the writer and his audience feel about their own culture; the compensations they are prepared to make for repressive morality or excessive materialism and so on.

As one instance of the significance of such issues, let me briefly cite the case of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, the pioneering worker in social medicine in the psychology and care of the dying and the bereaved. Reacting against the modern western cultural rejection of death, and led by clinical evidence to theories of reincarnation, she for some time quite uncritically followed an American cult leader whose ideas and activities make him sound for all the world like an avatar of Lobsang Rampa and Helena Petrovna Blavatsky.[19]

Culture learning through literature is not always what it seems. It requires careful scrutiny of the text and studies beyond that into areas of the social sciences as well. The truths of literature are often double-edged or two-faced—pick your metaphor—but they are necessary companions in our search for human understanding across cultures and, even in their most spurious and popular forms, are deserving of our attention if only because they frequently reveal as much of our own culture and its stereotypes of others as they also introduce us to cultures outside of our immediate experience.

NOTES

1. This paper is a much-reduced version of the one originally prepared. Many of the points of theory listed in the original can be gleaned from such standard notes as:

   Cole & Scibner (eds.), Culture and Thought, New York: John Wiley, 1974
   Hall, Edward T., Beyond Culture, New York: Anchor Press, 1976
   Hymes, Dell, Language in Culture & Society, New York: Harper and Row, 1964
   Konigman, John H., Personality in Culture, New York: Harper and Row, 1967.

2. Various sources, inter alia articles in Hemisphere (Canberra) and Ivan van Sertima's They Came Before Columbus, New York: Random House, 1979.

3. Gelya Frank raises these questions in criticizing the social sciences for their apparent willingness to accept life stories at face value, as self-evident indicators of personality, culture, etc. "Finding the Common Denominator: a Phenomenological Critique of the Life Story", Ethos, 7(1), Spring 1979.

4. Malcolm Bradbury, "The Search for Methods of Cultural Study" typescript of conference paper, Culture Learning Institute, 1975.

5. Raymond Tschumi, "Cultural Communication and Transmission", in R. G. Popperwell (ed.) Expression, Communication & Experience in Literature and Language, London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1973, p. 21.

6. See the articles on Lotman in New Literature Review, No. 5 (Canberra, undated) and Ron Blaber's paper "Literary Theory and Contact Literature, M.A. Coursework paper, CLI, 1980.

7. Tuesday Lobsang Rampa (pseud.) The Third Eye, London: Secker & Warburg, 1956.

8. The other Rampa books are: As it Was; Beyond the Tenth; Candlelight; Cave of the Ancients; Chapters of Life; Doctor from Lhasa; Feeding the flame; The Hermit; I Believe; Living with the Lama; The Rampa Story; The Saffron Robe; Three Lives; Twilight; The Wisdom of the Ancients; You Forever (not in this sequence chronologically).

9. "Private vs Third Eye" Time, 71:50, February 17, 1958.

10. Guy Wint, "Asian Wonders", The Manchester Guardian, November 30, 1956, p. 9.

11. "Boyhood in Lhasa" Times Literary Supplement, November 30, 1956, p. 715.

12. Tuesday Lobsang Rampa, The Cave of the Ancients, New York: Ballantyne, (1957) rpt. 1963.

13. For example, letters XXIIIB p. 160 & IV p. 11 in Barker, A. T. (comp.), The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett, Philadelphia: David McKay, 1930.

14. For Example, Francis Younghusband, *Wonders of the Himalaya*, London: John Murray, 1924; Sir Charles A. Bell, *Tibet, Past & Present*, 1924, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924.

15. This figure is possibly based on Eiki Kawaguchi the Japanese rector of Gohyakurakan Monastery in Tokyo, who travelled to Tibet in 1897 in search of Buddhist texts. Annie Besant published the English translation of his reports, *Three Years in Tibet*, Adyar: Theosophical Pub. House, 1909-- a fact which may have led to Hoskin's hostile portrayal.

16. This Western response to Tibet is nowhere better exemplified than in W.M. McGovern's *To Lhasa in Disguise*, New York: The Century Co., 1924, a prime case of how not to go about cross-cultural encounter!

17. The British-encouraged anti-foreigner policy, calculated to insulate Tibet from Russia, China and the West (and thereby provide a buffer zone for the Indian Empire) acted as a strong stimulus to the European curiosity and sense of adventure. Accounts of entering "the Forbidden City" in disguise have the appeal of real-life drama and a spy-thriller plot, and seem to have also involved racial feelings of superiority in hoodwinking barbaric hill folk and superstitious monk-barons. Certainly, Madame David-Neel is outraged that a European should not be able to set foot wheresoever he or she will (*My Journey to Lhasa*, London: Heinemann, 1927) and travel books on Tibet by English, French, Russian, Danish, German, American and Japanese writers proliferated after 1904.

18. Edward T. Hall, *Beyond Culture*, *op. cit.*

19. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, Interview, *Playboy*, 28 (5), May 1981, pp. 69-106. Apparently, in a subsequent newsletter, Kubler-Ross denounced her former 'guru'.

IWAN SIMATUPANG AND CROSS-CULTURAL INFLUENCES

Pamela McCall

I would like to preface what I have to say with a brief historical outline of Indonesian literature in the twentieth century. This will also provide some insight into the influence of the West on writers other than Iwan Simatupang, the focus of this paper.

Most critics of Indonesian literature begin their analyses with the poetry of a man named Amir Hamzah, a Sumatran whose writing in the 1930s reflected the conflict many Indonesian people were then facing between traditional values as embodied in their indigenous lifestyle and the modern, western values conveyed to them through their Dutch colonial masters for over 300 years.

This very real conflict left most thinking Indonesians with a sense of being in a cultural no-man's land. Their Dutch education provided them, on the one hand, with a burning sense of nationalism (an ironic result of colonialism in most countries) and, on the other, with the realization that their cultural identity was undergoing a major upheaval, with European thought undermining indigenous ideas.

Indonesian literature of the period is basically a record of this conflict, with writers looking to their past and their future for inspiration. It is in fact a dichotomy with which contemporary writers are still grappling.

Interestingly, it was the most thoroughly westernized literature which left the greatest mark. Chairil Anwar, writing in the early 1940s, had as his mentors Dutch symbolist poets, read German and English, (notably Eliot and Auden), and drew inspiration from Beethoven and Mozart. His intellectual roots were clearly in Europe and not in Asia, and he has been described elsewhere as "the epitome of the Bohemian artist".[1]

Idrus, who contributed most to prose, also modelled his writing on that of Dutch authors. He wrote with a certain detachment and cynicism reminiscent of European writers. He believed that by incorporating Western conventions into Indonesian literature, it could become universalist while being at the same time recognizably Indonesian.

Sitor Situmorang has been dubbed by a prominent Western critic as "a poet between two worlds", a title which seems self-explanatory in the light of the foregoing remarks.[2] After living for two years in Paris, he adopted into his writing elements of existentialism and explored such Western-derived themes as ennui, aimlessness and hedonism. He believed it to be the fate of the modern Indonesian intellectual and artist that he can no longer 'go home' as he doesn't know where 'home' is.

Despite the fact that it is now accepted form for Balinese, Javanese, Sumatrans, etc., to think of themselves as first and foremost Indonesian, and only secondarily Balinese, etc., in the early decades of this century the distinctions between the islands were more clearly maintained. This is relevant because the writers mentioned were all Sumatrans. Sumatra for a long time was the home of many trading and commercial communities which adopted both

Islamic and Christian world-views in a relatively unadulterated form. Along with those world-views came ideas such as individualist economic enterprise and initiative, as well as the views of reformist Islam. It is worth noting at this stage that Iwan Simatupang was a Sumatran.

The Javanese response to the West, on the other hand, was more muted, and the writers in particular were more selective in adopting elements of Western literature. It is still a commonly held view amongst Indonesians that Javanese are more complex and subtle: more 'Eastern', whereas non-Javanese (and particularly Sumatrans) are straightforward, caring little for refinement, in short, more 'Western'.

One example of the more 'Indonesia-centric' writers is Pramudya Ananta Toer. Though he had some influence from Europe, his greatest inspiration was derived from China, and he shows none of the broad internationalism of Chairil, Idrus or Sitor. He was preoccupied with the essential 'aloneness' of the individual, which (though it may well be interpreted as an existentialist concern) he treated in a very 'Asian' manner by pleading for a return to communal living and relationships.

Towards the end of the fifties young writers began to emerge who were the first products of a purely Indonesian education system. Their response to the West was even more diminished than that of Pramudya. They read no European works and no foreign languages, and they were regarded by writers of the Idrus/Sitor mould as very sentimental and immature.

Against this brief background then, let us examine what Iwan has to offer. As I mentioned earlier, he was a Sumatran, born in the town of Sibolga in 1928, into a Roman Catholic family. After taking part in the 1945-1949 revolution against the Dutch, he studied medicine in Surabaya in Java, then went to Europe to study anthropology and drama in Holland, followed by philosophy at the Sorbonne in Paris. He returned to Indonesia in 1961, having married a Dutch pianist. His writing career then turned to prose, short stories and plays; in the fifties he had written mostly poetry and essays. He died in 1970. In this paper I wish to concentrate largely on his novel Ziarah published in 1969. There are three reasons: having been translated into English (by Harry Aveling as The Pilgrim)3, it is more accessible to non-Indonesian speakers; secondly, space does not permit an exhaustive coverage of all his novels and plays — and to be meaningful, a coverage of Iwan's works must be exhaustive; and the third reason is purely subjective — it is my favorite amongst his works.

I wish to return for a moment to the novels written by Indonesian writers earlier in the century. It has been suggested elsewhere that the developing maturity of Indonesian literature was marked by a growing complexity in the issues treated in those novels. Those written in the 1920s for example had in common the theme of one character trying to find his/her place in the world, the result usually being the so-called 'happy ending'. As the literature matured, so too did the issues treated in the novels, so that characters became involved not only with their own place in the world but also with more complex relationships with other characters, and endings were more often compromises, or at least ambiguous, rather than resolutions of any kind. This phase gradually evolved to the point where writers were concerned primarily with the world, the situation they were depicting. The actual characters played only a secondary role. What assumed significance, to use a theatrical analogy, was the stage upon which the characters were playing and not the characters themselves. I will give a couple of examples, drastically simplified. In Pramudya's story Keluarga Gerilya he is discussing not so much the lives of the family members, but the issue of man as an individual and man as a member of society.[4] The characters are used to get this message across. Similarly in Mochtar Lubis' novel Jalan tak ada Ujung, while we are introduced to the characters of Hazil, Guru Isa and Fatimah, what is important is the situation in which they live, not so much their individual life stories.[5]

This brings me to Iwan's novels, in which this process of reducing the significance of the characters has reached the stage where he doesn't even give them names. In all three of his major novels, Ziarah, Merahnya Merah and Kering, the major characters are nameless and are referred to either by their occupation, their former occupation or simply as "our hero".[6] The characters have been dehumanized to the point where they are mere puppets of the action of the play, manipulated by the situation in which they find themselves. One critic suggests that the characters are merely part of the cosmos Iwan is describing.[7] This then marks a radical departure from the novels of the 1920s and 1930s, where the characters of a novel were its be-all and end-all.

In 1960 Iwan wrote an essay entitled "Mencari Tokoh Bagi Roman" ('Looking for Characters for Novels') in which, after telling us that he knows of novels in which there are no characters, just words, words, words, he goes on to quote the French dramatist Samuel Beckett, who claims that characters don't matter any more, that it's the situation that counts.[8] Beckett makes the comment that without characters, the reader can feel the situation more clearly, without being diverted by people clamoring for our attention.

Iwan's own plays and novels fit very neatly into this category. Insofar as they exist, his characters never develop - we are shown aspects of their characters only, in haphazard order, as they relate to the situation being portrayed at the time. The characters seem inhuman; they have no name; the reader never formulates an idea about whether a particular character is good or evil, ugly or beautiful. He is neither a hero nor an anti-hero; he is a mere device of the writer.

I would like to refer for a moment to one of Iwan's plays, Petang di Taman, in which I believe there are quite close parallels with the works of Beckett, Ionesco and other members of the Absurdist school.[9] There are four nameless characters, distinguished by the titles Old Man, Middle Aged Man, Balloon Seller and Woman. (Incidentally, the play was set in Amsterdam.)

The play consists of a series of incidents, each ending in hysteria — first when the balloon seller loses all his balloons, second when the woman accuses the middle-aged man of being the father of her illegitimate child, and third when the old man breaks the news that not only has his wife taken up with a younger richer man, but his cat has run away after eight years. At the end nothing is resolved; the situation reverts to what it was at the beginning. Hardly profound stuff, perhaps, but one is left with the distinct impression that, just as Beckett and Ionesco aim to convey the message of the basic futility of one man's attempting to achieve constructive communication with another, through the outwardly simple, structurally meaningless 'conversations' between 'characters', Iwan is telling us the same thing through a (perhaps contrived) display of words, words, words between caricatures.

Here is just one example of the similarity between conversations — or I should say exchange of words — in this play and Ionesco's *The Lesson*:

From *Petang di Taman*:	From *The Lesson*:
It's going to rain. The sky's overcast.	Seven and one?
Is it the rainy season?	Eight.
No, it's the dry season.	Seven and one?
It doesn't rain in the dry season.	Still eight.
Who says so?	Very good answer. Seven and one?
What month is it?	Eight again.
I wouldn't have a clue.	Excellent. Perfect. Seven and one?
I'm right then. It's the rainy season.	Eight for the fourth time. And sometimes nine.
	Magnificent! You're magnificent! Sublime![10]

The logic behind both these extracts, and countless others in both plays, defies any rational interpretation. One must simply ask, at whatever level one tries to interpret it, 'what's the point?' Which of course is precisely the question Ionesco (and, I venture to add, Iwan Simatupang) wants us to ask.

At this point I wish to give a brief summary of the story of *Ziarah*, about which, as I mentioned, I wish to make most of my comments. The title is difficult to translate. Harry Aveling uses the term 'The Pilgrim', which is a little misleading, first because the word *ziarah* refers to an action, not a person, and secondly because its meaning is culturally loaded. It actually means a visit to a sacred place, usually a grave — of one's parents or ancestors or a saint, for example. A more appropriate translation would perhaps be 'The Pilgrimage'. The concepts of death and life are so inextricably bound up with each other that at the end of the novel when "our hero" is wandering through the cemetery, he is seen as making a pilgrimage not to someone who has died but "to mankind".

The chief characters of *The Pilgrim* are an artist and a cemetery overseer. Through a series of complicated flashbacks we discover details about their past which in both cases have shaped their current situation. The two are enemies, in the cold-war sense, throughout the novel. The overseer, a former philosophy student, knows that the painter, now decrepit, unproductive and drunken after his wife's death, abhors the thought of entering the cemetery. The overseer has a burning desire to see him suffer and decides to offer him a job whitewashing the cemetery walls. To his amazement the painter accepts the offer; the tables are turned and eventually it is the overseer who is driven to suicide, due in part to the failure of his experiment.

I feel it is necessary at this point to make a comment on the two interpretations of the Absurd as witnessed in French writings. A distinction is usually made between Camus' concept of living out a life of autonomous choice in a universe that no longer makes sense because there is no God to resolve its contradictions (this is what Kierkegaard called 'Despair'), and

Absurdity *à la* Ionesco — for whom life was simply a ridiculous, hilarious farce. Ionesco himself says:

> the fact of being astonishes us, in a world
> that now seems all illusion and pretence,
> in which all human behaviour tells of absurdity
> and all history of absolute futility; all reality
> and all language appear to lose their articulation
> to disintegrate and collapse, so what possible
> reaction is there left, when everything has
> ceased to matter, but to laugh at it all?[11]

Ziarah, I believe, combines both aspects of the Absurd. Whether or not this was Iwan's intention we can never know, but along with the elements of despair there are moments of sheer farcical humour.

Irrationality, or lack of proportion, plays a prominent part in the novel and the characters themselves frequently make a plea for *proporsi* or 'proportion'. This irrationality manifests itself in the totally inappropriate reactions of people to certain events. For example, when the painter gets married there is such a big celebration and so many flowers are sent to him that soon the town is swamped with flowers and the smell of them reaches sickening proportions:

> ...next morning the whole town lay immersed under flowers from the hotel. The council workers were furious. The drivers of trishaws and horse-drawn carriages wore flowers behind their ears, in their button holes, in their fez, even in the spokes of the wheels. They covered the metal-work with flowers, just like in a procession. The beggars - hidden beneath flowers, flowers and more flowers - no longer looked tattered and pock-marked. There were gladioli, angelica, dahlias, chrysanthemums, roses, orchids and all sorts of flowers.
>
> It took a week to get rid of them. Everyone hated flowers by then; they wanted to vomit whenever they saw one. When a butcher tried to carve up a flower-seller who had not eaten all week for trying to sell him flowers, no one intervened. The judge gave him a stern warning, even the prosecutor never mentioned 'murder'. (*The Pilgrim*, p. 70)

This results in hostile feelings towards the painter and demonstrations against the couple until they are finally forced into exile in a little hut on the beach.

In another incident, some foreign visitors wish to visit the painter as he has made a name for himself with his paintings overseas. Horrified that the dignitaries should visit the painter and his wife in their little shack, the local administrators immediately begin to urge them to move back to a larger house. Because of their persistent refusal to do so, the mayor hangs himself. This produces more anxiety in the town, "not because a mayor has died but because the guests of State had arrived. And nothing had been prepared." (p. 78)

This seemingly disproportionate 'mass hysteria' seems to derive from an established 'order' of things the breaking of which lets loose turmoil and confusion. There are innumerable examples of things not being as they should be in this novel. After his wife dies, the painter refuses to sign the burial forms, causing great commotion in the office of the funeral director and the accusation that he has "created ... perhaps the greatest (scandal) this country has ever known". (p. 97)

When the philosophy student takes on the job of cemetery overseer, his father and his former professor are outraged, exclaiming, "A young man as handsome as he, as rich and as clever, shouldn't be wasting his life hanging around your cemetery." (p. 40) The professor later comments, "I had learnt much more from him than he had from me" (p. 122) -- another role-switch in line with the artist's becoming a whitewasher and the philosophy student cemetery overseer. To use Ionesco's words: "the world seems all illusion and pretence ... all reality appears to lose its articulation".12 In normal circumstances, Iwan seems to be saying, we are victims of rationality; however, we can just as readily become propagators of irrationality when "reality loses its articulation". Ionesco's plays show this sort of disproportion and irrationality too: in Victims of Duty when coffee is to be served to three of the characters, there is a mounting pile of hundreds of cups; in The New Tenant the furniture blocks up all the staircases, clutters the stages, then entombs the tenant; in The Chairs the stage is filled with dozens of chairs for invisible guests and in Jacques a young girl develops several noses.

The title of the novel suggests a preoccupation with death. This permeates the action and forms part of the thinking and philosophy of nearly all the characters. One of the principal characters lives in the cemetery, the other works there, and deaths occur consistently throughout the story.

There are two mayors in the novel. One of them regards himself as being above the common "dwarfish, dirty, stupid people with no other instincts than feeding and clothing themselves", but all his life he suffers "because the gods have made him too great for normal human standards but not great enough to be a genius". (pp. 18, 24) He is condemned to a life of answering telephones, opening letters and looking at his watch, and putting off until tomorrow all his ambitious plans. His death, which comes after he fails to perform a minor mayoral duty successfully, can be seen as a statement of his failure to ever realize his dreams. A recurring element in the novel is the disparity between the reality one dreams of and the reality one encounters: the dilemma of 'the dreamer'. This also is one of the prominent elements among the writings of the literature of the absurd. William Barrett in Irrational Man writes that "the divorce of mind from life ... (is) one of the central themes of existential philosophy ...."13

The cemetery overseer takes his own life after having lived in seclusion within the cemetery walls for 27 years. He finds the place ideal for his philosophical meditations and makes the comment that "wealth and property lose all meaning at the walls of the cemetery. Further, genuine philosophy exists only on this side". He also regards living as merely preparing for death: "We are future corpses walking on past corpses. The world belongs to the dead. The world is Death's kingdom". (pp. 43, 45) The incident which prompted this comment was his discovery that someone had stuck a 'Wanted Dead or Alive' poster of a criminal on the walls of the cemetery. He is indignant because death is thus reduced to the same value as life; his view of life was always based on the sovereignty of death. His decision to finally take his own life stems from a philosophical failure — as mentioned before, his failure to cause suffering to the painter. Life has failed once again to fulfill him.

Wary as I am of applying Western labels to non-Western writing, I nonetheless feel that many of the elements of this novel appear to be of an existential nature. Many existentialists contend that death is not simply the end of life, something that comes along at the end of the story, but is itself an integral part of that story. Heidegger (like the cemetery overseer) sees human beings as 'beings-towards-death' and sees death as the supreme possibility of human existence. He calls for a realistic inclusion of the death-factor among our plans and the way we evaluate them. Camus, while insisting on the need to face death as a reality, sees it as providing the absurdity of both man and the universe, the indifference and equivalence of all things in the long run. With regard to suicide, Camus feels that "the feeling of estrangement between a man and wife, which sometimes ends in suicide, is the most elementary way of expressing the absurd" and that the only way to face up to the dilemma (of absurdity) is to "preserve the paradox, to live the tensions and conflicts which it involves".[14] In Ziarah, perhaps, Iwan is portraying two types of character — those like the cemetery overseer who give into death as an escape from the dilemmas of life; and those like the painter, still alive at the end "preserving the paradox .... living the tensions which it involves ..."[15]

There is a feeling of lack of communication in the novel, and this feeling is heightened by the aforementioned theme of dreams versus reality. None of the characters seem to really know each other and the total absence of names increases this feeling. The painter does at one stage refer to the cemetery overseer as "my only friend", but significantly this is after the overseer's death.

The conversations between the characters in many cases reflect a total lack of sympathy between those involved, as if they were on different wavelengths. An example occurs when the mayor is explaining to the cemetery overseer that he is to be "non-activated" because he went against orders and had the cemetery walls whitewashed twice in one year instead of once. The mayor's conversation revolves around 'public' interests, the overseer's around private:

> "All I ask is the obedience written into the constitution of this country. The obedience each citizen owes his leaders."
> "But the constitution also guarantees my right to know why I must obey: in this particular case, to know why I have been non-activated."
> "The reason can be summarized as the 'public good'. Like other great ideas it is an idea not open to further discussion."
> "Why?"
> "Because then it would not be a great idea."
> "Isn't the decision dangerous to my well-being?"
> "You and all your problems are part of the previous term 'the public good'."
> "But what about my thoughts, feelings and private life?"

> "The public is greater than the individual, than any number of individuals."
> "Not the reverse, Your Worship? What we call 'the public' is, and can only be, comprised of individuals, human beings, free citizens ...." (pp. 15-16)

Another example is a conversation between the mayor and the cemetery overseer's former philosophy professor. The two are following separate trains of thought running along parallel lines:

> "Ha! Now you're entering dangerous grounds. Objectivity. According to Kant ..."
> "Shut up! To hell with Mr. Kant! Ppp...er, who is this Kant person?"
> "Ah, now you're trying to be objetive."
> "What?"
> "Kant, Immanuel Kant - was a German - a German philosopher."
> "Shut up! Enough! Stop!"
> "Enough?"
> "Yes, enough. If he's a German., I can tell you what sort of person he is and what his philosophy is likely to be."
> "So you've studied Kant. How encouraging, how encouraging."
> "No! and there's nothing encouraging about the situation at all. There's nothing more to be said, once you said that Mr. Kant is, firstly, German, and, secondly, a German philosopher."
> The professor thought deeply, then nodded.
> "Very profound indeed."
> "Profound? what is?" asked the Mayor, surprised again.
> "What you've just said. I've never looked at Kant from the perspective of national determinism. Truly amazing!" (p. 41)

The dialogue in most cases seems to suggest that every person has a given status in life and cannot expect to be able to communicate with someone from a different station or rank.

Lack of communication is also of concern to the existentialists, and of particular relevance here is Jaspers' conviction that only through communication with others can an individual become human and truth be found, and that the road to truth is "lost to the man who shuts himself off from others in stubborn self-will, who lives in a shell of solitude."16

There is further evidence to support the view that Iwan's portrayal of life in this novel is existentialist, namely, that the book demonstrates a concern witht he actualities of existence. The existentialists regard choice and decision-making as being vital activities for an existent being, and also regard decisions as not only leading to self-fulfillment, but also as involving self-renunciation, because by choosing one possibility one renounces every other alternative. In Ziarah we constantly see the administrators, over-awed by the prospect of making a decision about a problem, relegate that problem to a higher authority, until the mayor finally makes the statement, "...in the end, there is no other possibility, we must choose." (pp. 103-4) Soren Kierkegaard, known as the 'father of modern existentialism', believed that most people refuse to reach the point of decision-making, preferring to take refuge in neutrality, but that by doing so, they drift into a limbo of others' choices and never become themselves. Sartre called the anxiety involved with making a decision 'anguish'; the German term is Angst.

Some existentialists have criticized the pressures of a society that molds the lives of people and produces a world of conformists who rarely have to make a decision. I believe that Iwan is satirizing the order and routine of people's lives, which makes it extremely painful for them to accept the responsibility of making choices.

An important aspect of the novel is the plight of the 'outsider' in a world from which he is estranged. There are two outsiders in the novel — the cemetery overseer who, unable to communicate with living people, chooses to live in the world of the dead, and eventually takes the decision to join them, and the painter, who feels estranged from the society in which he lives, but rather than admit defeat by committing suicide, "lives the conflicts which it involves."

The theme of the outsider is fundamental to the literature of the absurd, and is one of the concerns of existentialist philosophy. I like to compare what Iwan is saying with the beliefs of Gabriel Marcel in The Mystery of Being:

> ...this strange reduction of a personality to an official identity must have an inevitable repercussion on the way I am forced to grasp myself; what is going to become of this inner life ... What does a creature who is thus pushed about from pillar to post, ticketed, docketed, labelled, become, for himself and in himself?[17]

It is possibly more than coincidence that Iwan was studying at the Sorbonne at the time of the publication of this book in the 1950s. Marcel is known to have influenced a contemporary of Iwan's, Wiratmo Sukito, who became known as a 'Christian existentialist'.

Writers of Iwan's kind have been the subject, if indirectly, of criticism from fellow-writers and intellectuals. One critic accused nameless writers of "without licence importing Camusianism into Indonesia, causing pessimism and cynicism to be rampant."[18] Another identifies among Indonesian intellectuals a "curious anxiety to justify themselves by appealing to Western concepts of art and thought."[19]

It seems quite fitting to conclude by quoting Iwan himself:

> And if we see Mr. Beckett the next day, and we tell him that we had nightmares all night after seeing his play, but that we still can't understand the point of it, and that it's driving us insane ... he'll laugh delightedly, slap us on the shoulder and say: "Ah, so my play was successful. Thank you!"[20]

This comment might equally apply to Iwan's own writing.

NOTES

1. Keith Foulcher, "Horizons within, horizons beyond", Australian Broadcasting Commission, September 1980.

2. A. H. Johns, *Cultural Options and the Role of Tradition*, (Essay titled: "Sitor Situmorang: A Poet Between Two Worlds").

3. Iwan Simatupang, *The Pilgrim* (tr. H. Aveling), Hong Kong: Heinemann (Asian Writers Series), 1975. Page references are to this edition.

4. Pramudya Ananta Toer, *Keluarga Gerilya*, Jakarta: Nusantara, 1962.

5. Mochtar Lubis, *Jalan tak ada Ujung*, Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya, 1971.

6. Iwan Simatupang, *Ziarah*, Jakarta: Jambatan, 1969.
   Merahnya Merah, Jakarta: Gunung Agung, 1968.
   Kering, Jakarta: Gunung Agung, 1972.

7. Umar Junus, *Perkembangan Novel-Novel Indonesia*, Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Universiti Malaya, 1974.

8. Iwan Simatupang, "Mencari Tokoh Bagi Roman" *Siasat Baru* , 30th March 1960.

9. Iwan Simatupang, *Petang di Taman*, Jakarta: C. V. Bakti Pustaka, 1966.

10. Ionesco, "The Lesson" from *Plays*, Vol. 1, (tr. Donald Watson) London: John Calder, 1958.

11. *ibid*, 'Introduction'.

12. *ibid*, 'Introduction'.

13. William Barrett, *Irrational Man*, New York: Doubleday, 1958, pp. 8-9.

14. John Cruickshank, *Albert Camus and the literature of revolt*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1959, p. 44.

15. *ibid*.

16. See Richard Ellmann and Charles Fiedelson Jr., *The Modern Tradition*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1965, p. 866.

17. Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, London: The Harrill Press, 1950, pp. 29-30.

18. Buyung Saleh quoted in Justus van der Kroef, *Indonesian Social Evolution*, Amsterdam: N. V. Boekhandel, 1958, p. 149.

19. *ibid*, p. 153.

20. Iwan Simatupang, "Mencari Tokoh bagi roman," *op. cit.*

THE MODERNIZATION OF A POETIC TRADITION:
Some Problems and Perspectives

Wimal Dissanayake

The Sinhalese poetic tradition has evolved over a remarkably long period of twenty centuries. The earliest known examples of Sinhalese verse are to be found in some of the stone inscriptions composed in the first century B.C.[1] Since then, Sinhalese poetry has grown steadily, drawing on the storehouse of Buddhist literature for its themes and Sanskrit literature and aesthetic theories for the directions in poetic craft.

As with most traditional literatures, the writings of classical Sinhalese poets were highly conventionalized. Writers dealt with a limited range of themes and subjects that were sanctified by tradition. The narration of Buddhist stories, the eulogizing of kings, and descriptions of natural beauty figured prominently. In terms of form and technique, poets adhered to the strict rules of verse-making that were laid down by classical theorists. Seen from a modern perspective, one of the most distinct features of classical Sinhalese poetry is the transpersonal posture adopted by the poets.[2] It was the duty of the poet to narrate the life of the Buddha in verse in a highly ornate style using stereotypical imagery in accordance with immutably rigid traditional meters; little, if any, of the poet's own personality was allowed to show. The following stanzas taken from one of the most well-known classical Sinhalese poems reflect this convention-bound form of writing:

> Not only was the moon-king decked with jewels of clear bright pearl -
> the moon's bright stars - with white blossoms
>
> And linen robes as the moon's white beam, but also
> He made those night-lotuses his peoples' desires unfold.
>
> This swan-king, snared by the honey of drink,
> Played in that lake, his fatal hall, where the night-lilies
> Were fair women, the stalks their strings of pearl
> Their eyes the darting fish, the lotuses their bowls of wine.[3]

Here, the language and the imagery bear the unmistakable imprint of traditional injunctions related to poetry. The epithets are stereotypical and are indicative of the poet's desire to conform.

It was this poetic tradition that the modern Sinhalese poets sought to renovate. In the sixteenth century, Sri Lanka came under Western domination — first the Portuguese (1597) and then the Dutch (1658) and the British (1795) conquered Sri Lanka. In 1815 the British succeeded in conquering the entire island. This Western rule, of course, had profound consequences for the evolution of Sri Lankan society. A new social structure began to take shape; English became the language of administration and education; Christianity was looked upon as the favored religion. These and other similar factors, naturally, contributed towards the creation of a new conciousness. The urge to modernize the Sinhalese poetic tradition was an outcome of this newly-formed consciousness.

The Sinhalese poetic tradition had undergone numerous changes, as any living tradition must. Over an extended period of time there was a movement towards secularization, greater use of colloquial idiom, less display of ornateness and a diminishing interest in Sanskrit models of poetic composition. Martin Wickremasinghe, perhaps the most perceptive of modern Sinhalese critics, described in the following terms the change that had taken place in the poetic tradition by the fifteenth century:

> The poems of the classical period sprang up in the rocky soil of Alamkara (ornamentation) and died as rapidly because their roots were not deep. They had not reached the mainsprings, the thought and feeling of the folk. The new poetry made an alliance with the rhymes and language of folk verse . . . . The literature left the courts and harems of kings and went into the countryside where it gathered a variety of rhythms from songs of the peasant folk. For once, the poet left the jewelled spires and crystal ramparts of, for the most part, imaginary cities, and attempted to describe the real things he saw. For the first time poets stopped using vocabulary which had no significance except for the learned and began to use ordinary words full of emotional associations for the common folk.[4]

However, it is only in the twentieth century that we witness a decisive break with the past consequent upon the emergence of new modes of feeling and a new order of sensibility. That the increasing impact of Western civilization had a catalytic effect on the rate of change is indeed patent, and the degree of flexibility which had been introduced into the Sinhalese poetic tradition no doubt facilitated this transition. The growth of Sinhalese poetry in the twentieth century is the story of the attempt to modernize the poetic tradition without forfeiting its popular appeal.

The modern period in Sinhalese poetry commences with the writings of the so-called 'Colombo poets' like Meemara Prematilake, P. B. Alwis Perera, Sagara Palansuriya, Wimalaratne Kumaragama and H. M. Kudaligama. They felt that the classical Sinhalese poetic tradition as it was handed down to them was deficient in many respects, and that there was a strong need to introduce new elements which were more in consonance with the Zeitgeist. The spread of general education and the new media of communication, the growth of a sense of individuality and the increasing infiltration of western values into Sri Lankan society were the main agents in the creation of this Zeitgeist. Despite their proclaimed desire, however, the Colombo poets adhered fairly closely to many of the requirements laid down by classical tradition.

The Colombo poets were mainly interested in writing about nature, social inequities and romantic love. In dealing with these themes they created a structure of feeling that was conspicuously absent in classical literature. A good proportion of classical Sinhalese poetry is concerned with extolling the beauty of nature. The following stanza, taken from the Selalihini Sandesaya is representative of traditional Sinhalese nature poetry.

> The stream called Diyavanna with its ripples and wavelets
> Seems a silk garment worn by the woman-city
>
> Worked with rows and red lotus, and figures of golden swans

Its spreading cascades the long rippling waist folds.[5]

What is interesting, on the other hand, about the nature poetry of the Colombo poets is the attitude of mind that animated their writing. If the classical poets described nature from a transpersonal viewpoint (without ever involving the personal emotion and identity of the poet) in the work of the Colombo poets it was the distinct individuality of the poet that made its unmistakable presence felt. The following stanza by a Colombo poet on the self-same river celebrated in the earlier poem illustrates this clearly:

To savour the divine pleasure pierced on your body
I came from afar, amidst wild bees
Swinging your waist, emanating moon's radiance
O youthful damsel of Sitawaka, do dance now.[6]

We find very little of social experience, especially the life of average men and women, depicted in Sinhalese poetry. Therefore, the attempts by the Colombo poets to write about the privations of the underprivileged in society (not, of course, without a certain measure of venom) was seen as an attempt to modernize the poetic tradition.

Those rich relations ignore him
He possesses nothing save the cloth he wears
Where indeed can a poor family rest?
What is the state's help to them.[7]

Similarly, the poetry of these writers dealing with romantic love signified a definite break with the past. It was not as if classical writers did not portray romantic love. What is distinct, though, about this body of romantic poety is the tone of approbation with which it is presented. In traditional Sinhalese literature, when and where romantic love went counter to the commonly accepted norms and values, it was portrayed as something undesirable and disruptive of social harmony. But in the poetry of Colombo poets, it was seen as something healthy and desirable and affording a solid basis for individual fulfillment. Much of their narrative verse bears out this contention. In writing about these subjects, the Colombo poets were greatly influenced by such English romantic poets as Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth, Byron, some poets of an earlier period, like Goldsmith, and of a later, such as Tennyson.

Apart from the question of subject matter, the Colombo poets sought to modernize the Sinhalese poetic tradition in two other respects — by discarding the somewhat artificial language medium and stereotyped imagery, in favor of a more colloquial idiom, and by creating less rigid poetic forms. Almost all of them, though, still composed poems according to traditional meters.

Despite the fact that the Colombo poets took a lively interest in the society around them and sought to modernize the poetic tradition, they fell far short of their objective. Two factors suggest themselves as having contributed to this failure. Almost all the Colombo poets were unable to explore in their writings significant human experiences — experiences which were complex and which invited serious attention. Instead, they were given to sterile posturing and attitudinizing. Only Kumaragama succeeded in endowing his poems with a measure of human significance. He produced discerning and sympathetic depictions of the privations of the peasantry, seeking to recapture the complex but fascinating relationship between man and nature in the remote villages of the north Central Province. His poems succeed in conveying the authority of lived experience.[6]

Secondly, the kind of language medium selected by the Colombo poets had neither the imaginative force, nor the precision, nor the suppleness that would facilitate the communication of a truly modern sensibility. They discarded the creatively outworn vocabulary sanctioned by tradition, but failed to fashion a vigorous idiom to take its place. Indeed, their poetic language can be characterized as essentially prosaic, now and then decked out with superficially glittering trite poeticalities.

As a reaction against and, in a sense, as an extension of the concerns of the Colombo poets, the Sinhalese "free verse movement" was launched. This was indeed a significant step. Until G. B. Senanayake first introduced free verse in the late forties, Sinhalese poetry had been composed to set meters. He, somewhat diffidently, characterized his writing as a form of literary expression existing between prose and verse. The following is a representative poem of G. B. Senanayake.

The Sin

Lord
Rise up and forgive my sin, Lord.
For it is not mind
but a sin of the mind;
not the mind's either
but of these senses.
Unheeding the mind
these my senses
on that occasion
burst forth, powerfully aroused.
But my mind
which knows only you,
did not join with the senses in their sin.
Rise up and forgive me, Lord.

I arose
tied up her hands and feet;
carried her
through the Rukkaththna grove, and
at the deep point
in the broad river
I flung her in.
Looking on
till the loud splashing
of the disturbed river
became quiet again
I returned; and
throwing myself on the bed
shut my eyes.[8]

Not only the formal structure, but also the mood and emotion explored in this poem are alien to the spirit of traditional poetry.

Although G. B. Senanayake introduced free verse to the Sinhalese readers, it was really Siri Gunasinghe and Gunadasa Amarasekara who succeeded in winning recognition for this art form. Their works like *Mas Le Neti Ata*, *Bhava Gita*, *Abinikmana and Uyanaka Hinda Liyu Kavi*, aroused much curiosity and a great deal of comment, some of it openly hostile. Many readers at the time (in the late fifties) expressed the view that free verse was an importation from the West, and that it went against the fundamental grain of Sinhalese poetry. Free verse writers were accused of debasing the art of poetry by blindly imitating Western forms.

The Sinhalese free verse writers made no attempt to conceal the fact that they were largely influenced by such modern English and American poets as Eliot, Pound and Lawrence, and by imagism and French symbolism in general. However, they did stress the fact — to my mind, with a large measure of justification — that Sinhalese free verse emerged not as a conscious attempt to impose an alien form on the reading public, but rather in response to a genuine and deeply felt need: the need to revitalize the Sinhalese poetic tradition and transform Sinhalese poetry into an instrument capable of imaginatively exploring modern problems and experiences.

The Sinhalese free verse writers like Siri Gunasinghe, Gunadasa Amarasekara, Mahagama Sekara and Wimal Dissanayake abandoned the metrical forms that had up till then been regarded as intrinsic to poetic statement. Much of their poetry can be regarded as explorations into mood and consciousness. The structures of feeling that are central to their poetry have little in common with those that were associated with classical poetry. In comparison to the work of the Colombo poets, the poetry of free verse writers contains very little of the rhetorical anguish that marred the writing of the earlier group. In the more accomplished pieces of the free verse writers one observes a mature valuation of human experience, a suppleness of language and the deployment of striking imagery. The following poem by Siri Gunasinghe is reflective of these strengths:

"Death, Impassive as the Himalayas"

Though it's said that
Death follows us everywhere
Shadow like, a dark black mass,
It is a lie, dredged out of fear

Noiseless,
Crouched, stalking upon soft pads
Death does not grab you by the heel.
Awaiting a chance
To strike from behind
On a dark night
Death does not lurk among the bushes.

Death is not in a cadaver
Death is not in a graveyard

It is the cowardice
Festering within you
That makes you look back furtively
Into the darkness behind.
Death does not use a dark blindfold
Does not trick you, or even deceive you.

He is not a stranger
Who works in secrecy
Rope in hand
He makes no bid to bind and gag you.

Death, impassive as the Himalayas
Stands beside you.
Embraces you, takes you in his arms.
Step by step, wink by wink,
It is you, who however closer to Death
It is you, who in stark terror scream.
Death does not give chase.
Calling it life
Day by day
You embrace
Only Death.
It's none other than life itself
Which, moment by moment
Comes into being
And ceases to be.
Like a burning dry leaf
Life
Withers and turns to ashes

Every drop of milk is Death
Every morsel of food is Death
Every kiss is Death

Why strive so hard
To escape
The clutches of Death
It is no use.
What you call Death and
Try to escape from
Is but the shadow of Death.
the real Death is Life itself
Death, impassive as the Himalaysa,
Stands beside you.9

Despite the fact that the poem is slightly over-written, it reflects a serious interest in human experience and a sensitive use of language and imagery. Unfortunately, such instances are not as common as one might wish.

Sociologically speaking, the Sinhalese free verse writers came from a different social background than that of the Colombo poets. Interestingly, the free verse writers were also referred to as the Peradeniya school — Peradeniya being where the University was situated. Many of the free verse writers were competently bilingual and were closely associated with the University. They were greatly influenced by the critical writings of Richards and Leavis and Empson and European poetry. Much of their writing displayed these diverse influences. The following are but two examples:

Dirty Dishwater

Man's mind is a kitchen
Learning, it's dishwater
I grovel, lapping it up.

Black crows flock
To drive me away
It is not easy to escape.

Dishwater stagnates in the drain
With stale leftovers
Scraped off broken plates.

No salt or flavour in it
Nothing to fill one up

Hurt by a hurled coconut shell
Leg-lifted
Yelping
I still cannot tear myself away
From that drain.

All that gave life
To a lifeless existence -
Dishwater
The only flavour
In a flavoured life -
Stale food.[10]

This poem by Siri Gunasinghe contains echoes of Lawrentian philosophy and French symbolist technique. Similarly, the following poem by Wimal Dissanayake reflects a preoccupation with Imagism.

The Death of an Old Woman

The holy book
Lies open on the table

The compound drifts
With withered leaves

The lamp that shone there
Flickers no longer

Now and then
Behind the hut
A stray dog barks.[11]

At times, though, one felt that their reading of Western literature unduly and jarringly obtruded itself on the poetry, much to the detriment of the latter. Many of the free verse writers were accused of leading an ivory-tower existence and attempting to deal with problems that were more imaginary than real and that emanated from a reading of Western literature rather than from an encounter with lived reality. This tendency had the effect of alienating a large segment of the readership for poetry that had been created by the Colombo poets.

By the late sixties, the interest in free verse began to diminish. It was often stated in almost a tone of protest that much Sinhalese free verse was too cryptically cerebral to warrant ready emotional participation on the part of the readers. The question of language, too, presented itself as a formidable issue. Siri Gunasinghe was one of the poets who discarded the then fashionable poetic idiom on the grounds that it was inextricably linked to certain stock and shallow experiences. He, along with certain others who subscribed to this way of thinking, sought to create a rich language replete with newly minted metaphors. This was indeed a notable step in the right direction, although the results were not always commensurate with the ideal. There are, to be sure, strikingly, picturesque turns of phrase and refreshingly original imagery in their writings. Describing a water-buffalo, Siri Gunasinghe says:

> My beard on fire
> in haste
> I was running, running down in the dawn
> bearing the burdens of life
> all on my back:
> at the edge of the road, in a large clump of grass,
> like a fat merchant sprawled on his easy-chair
> I saw you.[12]

In a similar bold fashion he compares past memories to a flock of wild beasts:

> Forsaking me
> leaving my limbs death-stiff
> she left — disappeared —
> went away;
> and I became a prey
> to a flock of wild-beast memories
> a bloody prey.[13]

Despite such efforts, many of the most discerning readers felt that this move, interesting as it was, was characterized by a certain contrivedness, and that it was not adequately anchored in tradition and cultural memory to strike a spontaneous chord of response in the readers. Another constricting factor that contributed to the diminution of interest in free verse was that many who were keen to practise this form did not have a clear notion of what it entailed in terms poetic craft and self-discipline. Consequently, writing free verse amounted to chopping up badly written prose. T. S. Eliot's famous statement that, "No verse is libre for the man who wants to do a good job",[14] should have had a pointed message to the Sinhalese poets of the sixties.

It was with the intention of remedying this situation that Gunadasa Amarasekara, whose name had once been linked with the free verse movement, urged a re-thinking of modern Sinhalese poetry. Strictly speaking, though, Amarasekara cannot be called a writer of free verse because a ghost of meter lurks behind all his poetry. He expressed the view that free verse lacked the support of tradition in terms of language as well as of form, and as a result it alienated the general reader. To rectify the situation, he sought to draw on the cumulative richness of Sinhalese folk-poetry which had up till then been largely ignored by the literati, as not being worthy of serious consideration. He made use of folk-imagery and folk-rhythms in his poetry, as is evidenced in the following stanza. Here the poet describes, much in the manner of a Sinhalese folk-poet, how darkness generates undefinable fears.

> Their footsteps clatter noisily as they rush about our yard,
> They chase each other around and around and surround the house
> They peer in at the window, hurl blood-curdling shrieks and yells
> They are trying to get in at the door, where shall I hide myself?
>
> They kick the door again and again, demand I open it.
> They squeeze each other by the throat, scream with death-like shrieks.
> They host three hoots three times in succession, leer through the window-pane
> There's no escape for me now, where shall I hide myself?[15]

Gunadasa Amarasekara succeeded, up to a point, in investing his poetry with a traditional coloring, thereby winning back the sympathy of many readers who had forsaken poetry having been put off by the experimentations of the free verse writers. In the process of doing so, he raised two important issues to which he has not as yet provided adequate answers. The first question is whether the folk-idiom has sufficiently broad a range to communicate complex experiences associated with modern life. The second is whether a reliance on the folk idiom will not in point of fact stifle linguistic creativity.

With the dawn of the seventies, new social forces were activated and new trends were set. The increasing numbers of unemployed graduates were in the forefront of a new activism. They were educated, poor and securely anchored in the village society. They were disillusioned with the existing political parties, both right-wing and left-wing, and were on the look-out for alternatives. In April 1971 a period of insurgency began in Sri Lanka which has been described as producing "a convulsion of political violence on a scale previously unknown to the nation". As a consequence, over 10,000 persons were taken into custody.[16] It is interesting to note that 89.7% of those detained were between the ages of 16-30. The following table bears this out:[17]

Age Distribution of Detained Persons

Age	Number	%
15 and under	107	1.0
16 - 20	3,573	35.1
21 - 25	4,183	41.0
26 - 30	1,386	13.6
31 - 35	448	4.4

36 - 40	201	2.0
41 and over	294	2.9

This new activism permeated all the arts. A newer breed of poets who had their roots in the soil of the land, but were also intensely aware of modern social currents, sought to fashion poetry into an instrument of social analysis. Unlike the poets of the sixties, who were, by and large, intellectuals ensconced in their own private worlds, the newer poets sought to give expression to the harsh social problems that they had to contend with in their day-to-day life. As one commentator, speaking of these poets remarked, "This close identification with the needs and aspirations of a larger group had led the creative writers of the 1970's to feel themselves the voice and pulse of a new social group. It has given their poetry a degree of social concern not hitherto encountered in the literature."[18] The following examples admirably reflect this new social consciousness and commitment that has come to characterize modern Sinhalese poetry.

A Blind Beggar's Song

You who see the sun, moon and stars
Do not see my two eyes
And seeming not to have seen my face
Sit looking far out, beyond

I who have not seen sun, moon or stars
Yet know you by your eyes
And recognizing you to be human
Beseech you to be kind.[19]

Here, the ironic twist of the poem serves to reinforce the poet's social vision rather pointedly.

In the following poem by Paraksama Kodituwakku, the plight of the protagonist draws attention to the stark social realities with which the majority of the people in Sri Lanka have to contend.

Cane in one hand
letter in the other
I read;
My mind kindles
Kusumawathie
is there anyone in the world
with the right to punish you?
Rather decree that society be punished
lashed with a whip
for leaving you
with only two white dresses

One dress is split right down the back
I've darned it twice or thrice
The other one by the end of this term
will disintegrate with sweat.

Oh for another dress!
The only issue at home is that
My one prayer is that

If I get it
even in a dream
I will surely come
next term too -
to the Central-High-School
to obtain the wealth of learning.

Although the poem hovers on the brink of sentimentality, the poet's deft transition of moods acts as a saving strategy. The poem concludes with the beautifully lyrical lines:

Yes sir ....
Skipping from stone to stone
Skipping from stone to stone
Laughing ....[20]

Similarly, Wimal Dissanayake, looking back on the late fifties and sixties, portrays the smugness and pretentiousness of the intellectual writers in a self-deprecatory tone.

While little children shriek with hunger
And brittle bones pierce the thin flesh
And as poverty, skeleton-like, comes rushing
From among the stenchful shacks
And as young men and women looking for jobs
Drench the city with pouring sweat
Having climbed to the topmost floor of the ivory tower
Banqueted to the heart's content
We argue passionately
About the rhythmic subleties of Eliot and Pound.[21]

That there has been a dramatic shift of emphasis in the concerns of the poets of the sixties and seventies is patent. The following content analysis of one hundred poems selected at random (fifty poems each from the sixties and seventies) enforces this point. This analysis, to be sure, does not do full justice to some of the more complex poems in which personal emotions and social commitment are indissolubly linked. However, it does indicate the broad contours of change.

Themes	60's	70's
Loneliness	18	8
Love	11	10
Nature	9	7
Social Issues	6	21
Others	6	4
	50	50

It is interesting to note that, while in the sixties the theme of loneliness and alienation figures prominently, in the seventies the theme that mostly seemed to engage the imagination of the poets was one of social issues.

During the seventies a large number of young writers published slim volumes of poetry. Of them, Monica Ruwanpathinana, Parakrama Kodituwakku and Dayasena Gunasinghe are perhaps the most noteworthy. They write about both social issues and personal emotion with a great sense of confidence. They have, in their best pieces, succeeded in blending the classical, folk and colloquial idioms with remarkable skill which cannot, of course, be captured in translation. A large number of poems, produced during this period barely rise above sloganeering and propaganda. To write about social problems persuasively and poetically is a highly exacting task, and the vast majority of the young writers of the seventies were simply not equal to it.

This rapid survey of the evolution of modern Sinhalese poetry over the last four decades draws attention to a number of problems and perspectives related to the modernization of a traditon. Indeed, they are the kind of issues that are likely to surface in any traditional society with a long literary heritage seeking to come to terms with the twentieth century. They can be summarized as follows.

1. However good the intentions may be, unless the body of poetry that is produced in support of modernization of the tradition does measure up to the highest standards, not much progress is likely to be made. This is made clear by the failure of the Colombo poets.

2. The impluse to modernization cannot proceed so far ahead as to lose touch with the tradition, both classical and folk. Too drastic a break with tradition is likely to prove counter-productive as is evidenced in much of the poetry produced by the free verse writers.

3. The urge to modernize a poetic tradition can generate healthy results only in an atmosphere of shared values. This is clearly seen in the failure of the free verse writers. They were mostly fluently bilingual and championed norms of conduct, values and a world view that were not shared by the bulk of the people. On the other hand, the great preoccupation with social issues reflected in the poetry of the seventies facilitated the speedy modernization of the Sinhalese poetic tradition. The general readership found the substance of the poetry so relevant to their daily experience that they agreed to endorse the formal innovations that it contained--innovations which were rejected when introduced earlier by the free verse writers.

4. The attempt to modernize a poetic tradition is characterized by a dialectical interplay between change and continuity. The free verse writers of the sixties sought to introduce a number of new features, both substantive and formal into the domain of Sinhalese poetry. They were very much Western in complexion. The general readership felt that these novel features constituted too sharp a break with the part. But at the same time, the free verse writers did make an impression on the sensibility of the readers. The poets of the younger generation combined elements of tradition and some of the newer features introduced by the free verse writers.

5. The urge to modernize a poetic tradition should answer to some of the deeply felt needs of a given culture. Modernization cannot be imposed arbitrarily from outside. It should be a natural outcome of largely endogenous cultural forces.

All these phenomena, then, point to one unmistakable conclusion. The impetus to modernize receives its forward thrust at the point at which poetic sensibility and contemporary consciousness intersect.

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ARUN JOSHI'S "THE FOREIGNER":
The Protagonist in Search of Meaning

Tina Shettigara

Arun Joshi has recently published his fifth work of fiction, which is his fourth novel, the other work being a collection of short stories. The central characters of his novels are all individuals in some way alienated from the world around them. They struggle with quests of the spirit and the corrupting influence of the material world, victims simultaneously of both forces.

However, these protagonists are portrayed as very real figures. The situations they encounter are for the most part common to every human life: love, pain, marriage, work, moral issues and matters of conscience. An engagement with life and the decisions one must make in life are the thematic links between the novels.

The central character of The Strange Case of Billy Biswas is probably the most extraordinary of Joshi's heroes. While living in the modern material world in the roles of scholar, son, husband and father, Billy is spiritually torn between following the expectations of that world and his own primordial urge to be free of its veneer: to feel the currents of nature simply and freely and to respond to instinct. When he is working as an anthropologist, the urge becomes stronger and eventually overtakes him. He disappears totally from the world of which he was once a part and lives in a tribal world with a new, tribal wife who bears him another, tribal son. Altruism causes him to identify himself to the civilized world in order to prevent a catastrophy. This action proves to be his own sacrifice, for the 'civilized' world attempts to retrieve him but succeeds only in hunting him down and slaughtering him. The 'civilized' world, analagous to the conscious mind, cannot and will not tolerate the surfacing of the primitive, which it fears, and so violently suppresses it.

Ratan Rathor, narrator of The Apprentice, is a victim in another sense. He is not a memorable character like Billy Biswas. He is 'Mr. Ordinary' who becomes embroiled in and corrupted by the materialistic world. His spirit is anaesthetized by the influence of that world. He begins as an enthusiastic young clerk, made more enthusiastic and anxious to please his superior officer by the tenuous nature of his wartime temporary position in the government service. He enters into an apprentice relationship with his supervisor whom he admires almost to the point of worship. His enthusiasm and his willingness "to toe the administrator's line" alienates him from his fellow workers, but nevertheless it pays off when he becomes permanently appointed and others are laid off at the end of the war. At that stage, he is unaware of the price he has paid. His soul has been sold to the system and it posesses him. Furthermore, the system is corrupt and he, in his turn, is corrupted by it. Ratan Rathor goes along with the passing of faulty goods which are bound for the front of a new war, the 1961 war with China. He does not do it for money, although he is paid for it. He has no clear motive at all, unlike his mentor in the deal who bears a deep grudge against society because of his background. Ratan Rathor has simply lost his conscience in his long association with corruption. He is one among thousands of similarly corrupted officials.

The difference in Ratan Rathor is that an accident of circumstance succeeds in reawakening his conscience. The police are investigating the faulty goods and Ratan Rathor is suspected, although nobody can bring final evidence against him. One unusually zealous and fervent young police investigator establishes an improbable connection between goods passed by Ratan Rathor and the sad case of Rathor's only life-long friend, The Brigadier. The Brigadier has returned from the Chinese front in a disturbed mental state. He spends many months in a repatriation hospital, but neither his wife nor Rathor understand exactly what is wrong with him. The truth is that the Brigadier is being court-marshalled for desertion. What the police investigation reveals to Rathor is that his friend's desertion was the direct result of faulty equipment that Rathor himself had passed. Without Rathor's confession, however, the case cannot be proven and the Brigadier will be found guilty and probably shot. Rathor has the opportunity to save his friend's life by sacrificing his own. After much internal struggle, his will to confess fails. His friend the Brigadier commits suicide. Rathor then undertakes a life-long project of atonement cleaning the shoes of people who are attending the temple. He never enters the temple himself. In his time of need, he discovers that the taint of corruption has extended even there. He also discovers that his former supervisor, who had started him on his career, was also involved in the passing of the faulty goods. The whole world appears to be corrupt, but Ratan Rathor's humble act each day is the constant reminder to himself to avoid such corruption in the future and the words "be good" reverberate in his head as a mantra.

Joshi's latest protagonist is Som Bhaskar of The Last Labyrinth (published 1981). Bhaskar is also embroiled in the world of affairs. He is a rich young industrialist with a flair for acquiring new companies. He is a cynic as a young man, easily irritated by his father's preoccupation with questions about "The First Cause" and his mother's reliance on Krishna rather than medicine when she is dying of cancer. His mother's death sparks off his fear of death. That fear is fuelled by his father's death, ostensibly of a heart attack, but according to the family physician and personal friend, K, of growing melancholia. Som Bhaskar's first near attack at an early age makes the fear of death a phobia.

. Som Bhaskar is also subject to the craving of a nameless desire manifest as the sensation of the words "I want" booming from space ("the Voids") in dream and in illness, or at other times of stress. Lust for women is the common sympton of the search for the panacea to this desire, but it is always quickly satiated upon possession and he returns to his devoted and faithful wife, Geeta. That is, until he meets Anuradha. She is the wife (or mistress; one is never really sure which) of a decadent, bhang-smoking fellow industrialist, Aftab, whose company Som Bhaskar wishes to acquire. The desire to take over the company is rapidly replaced by an obsession with Anuradha. She, and her world of Aftab's strange labyrinthine house at Benares, Benares itself, and the whole air of physical corruption and moral decadence that surrounds that world become a focus for his phobias, fears and desires. It is first an obsession of love and lust. However, when Anuradha leaves him, after he has suffered another, massive heart attack that K. says should have killed him, his insecurities are intensified and the obsession becomes one of hate. He resumes buying into Aftab's company, having suspended his purchases for Anuradha's sake (and virtually as a trade for her body), and pursues a block of shares to a temple in the Himalayas.

There he finds the mysterious Gargi, a deaf-mute, daughter of a sufi whose background is mysterious and miraculous, and is a part of Aftab's world. Gargi is one of the most mysterious characters of all in this novel of enigmas. At the temple, K., who has accompanied Som on his search, tells Gargi what Som did not know before. K. says that during Som's last attack he had given him up as dead when Anuradha visited. He gave Anuradha the news that there was no hope. Since then, Anuradha has intimated to K. that she had gone from Som's sickbed to Gargi to plead that she should save Som's life. At first, Gargi had refused to even acknowledge her power to do anything, but later charges Anuradha to give up Som entirely, and Som would live. So Som had recovered and Anuradha refused to see him anymore. (The story echoes the story of Gargi's father, who had fallen ill and was denying the existence of God. His father was advised to give up what he most loved and his son's life would be spared, so he called on God to take his own life. The father died and the son recovered.)

So the issue is finally one of faith or belief in God, or miracles, or at best, in something beyond the material world. Som Bhaskhar's skeptical mind cannot accept faith. He takes the shares which Gargi has in her charge and goes away vowing to have Anuradha as well. He visits Aftab's house seeking her. After an interview with Aftab, Anuradha comes out and pleads with Som to go away for his life's sake. When he returns the following morning, Aftab informs him that Anuradha has disappeared from the Janmasti celebration and cannot be found. Som Bhaskar has the police investigate but she is not found, and Som goes in real fear for his life, for Aftab, in his grief, has threatened him. The question of faith is, furthermore, unresolved, for Som cannot discover whether Anuradha's disappearance was the work of human interference or a mysterious disappearance engineered by God in fulfillment of the terms of boon granting Som Bhaskar life.

It can be seen that Joshi's exploration of the inner quest has become more complex with time. Billy Biswas was certainly a strange case, but his story is simply told as the record of an external narrator. Ratan Rathor reveals his tale to a much younger man as the unwinding confession of a conscience tortured despite his acts of contrition each day at the temple. By this means the complexity of Rathor's guilt feelings is fully portrayed.

In The Last Labyrinth the structure is as labyrinthine as the central themes and the processes of Som Bhaskar's mind. Symbols are used in a far more sophisticated manner to explore the complex psychology of a mind that is tormented by the relationship between the material and the mystical. Yet despite this growing sophistication of treatment, Joshi's interest has always been in the alienated being, whether the individual be extraordinary, as was Billy Biswas, supremely ordinary like Ratan Rathor, or psychologically disturbed in the manner of Som Bhaskar.

The same elements were present in Joshi's first novel, The Foreigner (published 1968). The hero-protagonist-narrator is Sindi Oberoi who, like his successors, is an individual estranged from the world around him. Joshi has here chosen the theme of the East-West encounter as another means of investigating the many forms of alienation.

Sindi Oberoi is in America studying at Harvard University. There he meets

June and he falls in love with her despite his reluctance to become involved. He also meets Babu Khemka, an immature student newly arrived from Delhi, sent by a father who expects the utmost from him. June, finding Sindi unwilling to commit himself, leaves him for Babu. Sindi is distraught but does not attempt to reclaim her. Soon Babu and June are engaged to be married. Sindi finishes his degree meantime and takes a job in New York. He hears that Babu, who has never done well in his studies at Harvard, has failed his exams. Babu is utterly disconsolate and despairing and June, at a loss to know how to cope with him, writes to Sindi. Sindi visits her in Boston where June assures him that things are sorting themselves out. Nevertheless, they spend the afternoon together, have dinner at an expensive restaurant and, back at Sindi's hotel, their tenderness for each other is revived and they go to bed together. When June returns to Babu, he accuses her of sleeping with Sindi. June, in anger tells him of their former relationship, which Babu had been too naive to recognize. In shock and anger, Babu drives away in his car. Some time later, Sindi is called to the morgue to identify Babu's body.

Sindi is so distraught at the circumstances of Babu's death that he decides on a radical change in his life. From various options he decides to go to India. While organizing this change of scene, he hears from June that she is four months pregnant with Babu's child. While wanting to help her, he postpones contacting her until he can obtain leave from his job and then arrives in Boston unannounced. He goes to her house in the middle of the night and is informed by a neighbor that June had died of an abortion and had been buried that afternoon. Controlling his grief, Sindi goes to Delhi and visits Babu's father and sister. He finds their questions about Babu's death embarrassing, for he feels guilty about it and yet angry with Babu for being the cause of June's death. Mr. Khemka offers Sindi a job as his personal assistant. Khemka is an industrialist with an expanding business. Sindi works for him for a long time, but typical of his principle of non-involvement, is personally unmoved when the affairs of the company are investigated and found to be corrupt and Mr. Khemka is jailed. Sindi accepts a position in Bombay, but the workers in the office at Khemka's business send an emissary to beg Sindi to stay and help save their jobs. Sindi becomes involved in their predicament and takes over the management of the company.

We might with glee seize upon the text of The Foreigner as yet another text on the East-West theme, hailing it as a new objective treatment. We might, too, take note of Sindi's cultural and geographical rootlessness and discuss the novel as a manual of detachment. Predictably, this is what most of the few critics who have given some attention to Joshi have done.[1] At least one, D. R. Sharma, has recognized that Joshi's heroes, Sindi Oberoi included, are not simply existential, Camusian outsiders, but are "deeply involved in the act of living, and that their predominant passion is to reflectively consider the element of choice in life."[2]

The Foreigner is constructed on two cross-cutting time-spans. The first is the time in America and the second is in New Delhi. Even here, especially in the American portion, there is not a strict chronological narration. This constant switch between India and America, combined with Sindi's cross-cultural birthright as the orphan son of an Indian father and English mother who was raised by an uncle in Kenya, actively suggests the perfect set-up for some objective treatment of the East-West theme.

It is also true that Sindi observes the society of the rich industrialist in India with as much objectivity as he also views the American middle-class suburban home of Mrs. Blythe or the attempts at cross-cultural communication hosted by the Harvard international students' association. He can coolly observe a person like Babu as he arrives in America from an innocent existence of over-protection in the Indian family and from experience note the phases of acculturation in such people, which, in Babu's case misfire and result in the destruction of human life.

Sindi's behavior in both America and India is that of one who is in contact with a different culture, but we are never sure what Sindi's own culture is. June frequently refers to him as a foreigner. She has a "feeling" which she confesses to Sindi on their second meeting that he'd "be a foreigner anywhere."[3] She is referring to more than national identification. Sindi, watches the International Students' Association Ball with a cynical eye and calls it a fraud, "intended to bring foreigners in contact with Americans, but all it ever achieved was animosity." (p. 21). Such an occasion makes Sindi "feel even more like an alien." (p. 22). Similarly, he begins work for Mr. Khemka and feels in no way a part of the hierarchical system of servility he finds. He says:

> I took a long time figuring out how I was expected to behave. I had no desire to cause a disturbance. Ultimately, I decided to forget about the figuring. It would have been impossible for me to behave like the others. (p. 13)

He had left Kenya because he "didn't fit in." (p. 166). But Sindi's quest is not for roots or a place with which he can identify. From Kenya to London, London to Boston, Boston to New York, New York to New Delhi, Sindi's quest is always for peace, and the meaning of life. The place itself means so little to him that when he decides to leave America, it can be decided by the flip of a coin: West or East, Nigeria or India, it is irrelevant. "I only wanted a place where I could experiment with myself," (p. 175), he says, and depends upon luck as much as choice in his quest.

It is not only this theme of foreigness, but also the reiterated idea of Sindi's attempt to achieve true detachment that makes him seem like the archetypal East-West existential protagonist. His inborn alienation from country and culture first makes him 'detached', but it is the pain of relationships that causes him to develop an ideal of detachment as the clue to his quest for peace and the meaning of life.

Sindi's understanding of detachment develops throughout the novel. Its tragic events cause him to reflect on his adopted stance of non-involvement and to modify it through various phases of self-realization to the point where he acknowledges at last that "sometimes detachment lies in actually getting involved," (p. 225) and takes on the job of re-establishing the Khemka business. Describing the first weeks of his management of the business, Sindi says:

> I knew there was no choice for me except to remain cool, as I had always been and to concentrate on decisive action. (p. 228)

That there should be "no choice" but "decisive action" is a delightful little paradox but also an important one, for the perceived lack of choice had been a key factor in causing the sense of futility that had governed Sindi's life. Early in the novel he agrees with a friend who says that there is no choice in life, (p. 76) and sees a futility in life when "death wipes out everything." Just before he decides to stay in New Delhi to manage Kemkha's business, he reflects upon the randomness of life that had brought him so far. He says:

> ...the randomness of existence had led me towards the target like a programmed missile. It had thrown me, Anna and Kathy and Babu and June, each working on his own random destiny. It need not have been so random. We could have acted with more responsibility, with greater detachment. (p. 221)

To that point Sindi's life has not been one of making decisions. He has let things happen. His becoming involved with June was the result of inaction and losing her was yet again the result of inaction. In this way, he had been confirming his self-formulated rule of life — that love was a decaying process — and he did nothing to make it otherwise.

Babu's death was the first event to shake that illusion. At various places he records the change.

> ...All along, I had acted out of lust and greed and selfishness and they had applauded my wisdom. When I had sought only detachment, I had driven a man to his death. (p. 4)
>
> Babu had kicked out all my beliefs and disproved all my theories. (p. 175)

Following this, June's death teaches him how vain his stance of inaction has been:

> I thought I was acting out of detachment, but was it not merely a desire to prove that I still held the key to June's happiness?
>
> I had presumed that I could extricate her from the web of her own actions just be simply standing still and letting her use me whichever way she wished. Nothing could have been further from the idea of detachment. That was a fatal presumption. (p. 196)

This realization eventually leads him to his new theory for the right way to live his life, something only the most painful experience could teach him.

Staying in New Delhi is a decisive move, the first really decisive step he had ever taken. In staying, he takes on the responsibility for other people's lives rather than pursuing a selfish desire to remain uninvolved. The struggle of Sindi Oberoi to arrive at an appropriate way in which to live and remain truthful to himself is a universal theme which ultimately has little to do with the theme of East-West encounter that critics have found emblazoned on the surface of this novel. Because Sindi is neither East nor West, his difficulties are not those of cultural encounter but of an individual in society. Furthermore, Joshi's explanation of the inner life of his character and the delicate equipoise between inaction and decision are continued in the other novels which have none of the East-West appeal of The Foreigner. In these, Joshi's world is one of modern India, a world of industrialists, big business and bureaucracies.

In The Strange Case of Billy Biswas, that world is pulled into sharp contrast with a world of the past into which Billy passes. Even so, the vital features of the story are not those of a violent clash of so-called civilization with a primitive world, whatever the surface story suggests. Rather, it focusses upon the life of Billy himself, who is carried through life on a minimum of decision-making: undertaking the study of anthropology instead of engineering, is probably his most decisive act until he decides to reveal himself to his friend (the narrator) in order to save his tribal people from massacre. Even his disappearance from civilization into the tribal world is not really the result of a decision, but the non-resistance of an urge within him and the pulls of nature. His decision to reveal himself is, like Sindi's act of involvement, the ultimate self-sacrifice or non-attachment to self.

Ratan Rathor is pulled along by events too. He does not decide to become a bureaucrat — it is the only job he can get at the time. He does not choose to become corrupt — one just does those things. He could not choose his own self-sacrifice to save his friend. Ultimately, he does decide upon an act of contrition and the only appropriate behavior for his life becomes encapsulated in that outward act and in the words, "be good."

Som Bhaskar is born into his role as rich industrialist and he becomes adept at acquiring companies not by choice but by circumstance. Similarly, he is ruled by phobias which are products of circumstance rather than action. Som marries Geeta because in a moment of his emotional defenselessness she is present and he expresses affection for her, their marriage growing from that point. Som's lust and love for Anuradha is something which grows on him like an obsession. In fact, if Som Bhaskar acts at all, it is under the drive of obsession rather than the clear decisive action seen by Sindi Oberoi to be the best mode of detachment at the end of The Foreigner. Nevertheless, Som Bhaskar is engaged in a struggle with life and with driving forces bigger than his own will. The events of The Last Labyrinth do not lead him to a resolution of his problems, but further into his mental labyrinth of psychological disturbance and fear.

The thematic concerns of these novels indicate that Joshi is interested in more deeply universal human problems than the superficial summary of The Foreigner as an objective treatment of the East-West theme would suggest. Joshi's choice of protoganist in his first novel is an indication of his deeper concerns. Sindi Oberoi, half Engish, half Indian by birth, raised in Kenya, educated in London and Boston, a sensitive person battered by emotional pain, a character without roots and anxious to avoid attachments is undoubtedly a cross-cultural or, perhaps more accurately, an extra-cutural individual. Yet, he is more than that. In the light of Joshi's later novels and by the evidence of the text itself, it must be seen that the individuals and their inner lives that he explores depict a searching for a meaningful anchor to existence, some firm basis of involvement or usefulness to humanity.

NOTES

1. C. N. Srinath, "The Fiction of Arun Joshi: The Novel of the Interior Landscape", *The Literary Criterion*, 12, 1976, pp. 115-33; Joshi Jain, "Foreigners and Strangers: Arun Joshi's Heroes", *The Journal of Indian Writing in English*, 5, January 1977, pp. 52-7; P. O. Bhatnagar, "Arun Joshi's *The Foreigner*", *The Journal of Indian Writing in English*, July 1973, pp. 9-14.

2. D. R. Sharma, "Arun Joshi and His Reflective Insiders," *Literature East and West*, 21, 1977, pp. 100-109, p. 100.

3. Arun Joshi, *The Foreigner*, Asia Publishing House, 1968, p. 30. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in the text.

COLD CULTURAL CURRY:
Anthony Burgess's "Malayan Trilogy"

Michael F. Duffett

One of Leavis's more dogmatic utterances is as follows: "The great English novelists are Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James and Joseph Conrad—to stop for a moment at that comparatively safe point in history." By the phrase "comparatively safe," Leavis presumably means that it is a point sufficiently removed from the present to allow of confident judgment; that comment about contemporary matters is likely to be distorted by the fact that the commentator is himself caught up in what he is attempting to judge. Anthony Burgess can be taken as an example. He is indeed concerned with subjects that are a matter, in his "Malayan Trilogy" at least, of unresolved history. Some idea of the difficulty experienced by critics attempting to assess Burgess's *oeuvre* may be glimpsed by considering the opening sentences of a couple of critical works. One, *The Clockwork Universe of Anthony Burgess* by Richard Mathews, begins: "Anthony Burgess may very well be the greatest living English novelist."[1] The other, *Anthony Burgess--the Artist as Novelist* by Geoffrey Aggeler belies the solemnity of its title by beginning thus: "And a very happy New Year to you too, Mr. Burgess!"[2] This is an opening of which, one feels sure, Burgess would have far more approved.

That last comment, of course, risks an assessment. It implies that Burgess himself has greater tolerance for the light-hearted, the flippant, as against the academic tomfoolery of the first book quoted. This preference, it seems to me, is eminently borne out by the events, characters and approach to what might otherwise be ponderous historical, social and political matters in *The Malayan Trilogy*.[3]

A short biographical note may serve best to introduce the trilogy. Burgess was Colonial Education Officer in Malaya and Borneo from 1954 to 1959 and this is the situation with which he deals. Some clue to the reasons for the *way* in which he deals with it—his preference for the light touch of the comic rather than the solemn pronouncements of the sociologist—may be provided by more detailed knowledge of his appointment. Dr. Frank McKay, Reader in English Literature at Victoria University of Wellington recalled to me a meeting with Burgess in which the latter related what actually happened. I have assumed the novelist's own art to reproduce the anecdote in rough paraphrase. (Burgess's real name is John Wilson.)

> I got a letter from the British Council requesting me to be present at their offices at 65 Davies Street for an interview for the position for which I'd applied. Position? What position? But I went and was asked all kinds of questions by all kinds of sober, dignified gentlemen, one of whom, at the conclusion of all this questioning, told me that they were satisfied with my qualifications (and presumably my answers to the sober, dignified questions) and that I would be appointed to the position.

> Me: Forgive me appearing rude, gentlemen, but what position?
> Sober Dignified Gentleman: Why, Mr. Wilson, the position for which you applied in your letter.
> Me: I wonder if I could see the letter sir.
> Sober Dignified Gentleman: But, of course. (SDG signals to secretary who returns with letter)
>
> And as soon as I saw it, continues Wilson, I knew what had happened. It was perfectly typed. And I only type perfectly when I'm completely pissed. So I had no memory of the matter.

Nevertheless, Burgess was appointed; and thus his advent to the Orient! A fitting beginning, one feels, for a man whose attitude to the whole weighty matter of colonialism is considerably less than weighty. It is a chance event, and he puts the protagonist of The Malayan Trilogy, Victor Crabbe, into a similarly haphazard pattern.

> It was partly accident my coming here—you know, answering an advertisement when I was tight—and also a kind of heliotropism, turning towards the heat. I just can't stand the cold. (p. 279)

A few more biographical details may illuminate the matter further and I can think of no better way of providing them than by quoting in its entirety the opening paragraph of a third critical work: "The Novels of Anthony Burgess: an Introduction" by John Cadman:

> Imagine for a moment a British colonial officer earning a very modest living in South East Asia. It is 1959. One day his doctor tells him he has brain cancer. He is given a year to live and invalided home to reflect upon the wasteland of his life: he had ambitions at one time to be a composer, but had failed. Virtually without means, he has nothing to leave his widow, and absolutely nothing to bequeath to posterity. Most mortals, confronted by such a fate, would despair. This resourceful fellow however, suddenly bursts into creative activity and, in the short space of twelve months, writes five novels! By doing so, he earns money for his wife and a reputation for himself. Destiny holds strange and unexpected twists: the cancer diagnosis turns out to be false. When the year has passed, he is still healthy and what is more, eager to write more. With bitter irony his wife is the one who dies, but Anthony Burgess, novelist, is born.[4]

It is a curious fate; one likely to give a man an outlook consisting of a strange mixture of attitudes toward life, swinging between poles of grateful exhuberance and bitter resignation. These attitudes are tailor-made, of course, for a detached comic vision rather than a solemn tragic one; comic in the wide sense of a Balzac or a Dante, but not excluding the narrower ambit of a Groucho Marx also necessary to Burgess's purposes in his three novels.

The trilogy, then—or to give it the perhaps better title by which it is known in America, The Long Day Wanes--is a comic achievement. And this is apparent from the opening words:

> "East? They wouldn't know where the bloody East was if they saw it. Not if you was to hand it to them on a plate would they know it was the East. That's where the East is, there." He waved his hand wildly into the black night. (p. 11)

From the first page we are introduced to what may be the element that has obscured any proper understanding of the East—ignorant certainty. Alan Watts has pointed out that the idea of some conglomerate 'East' is of dubious value in considering peoples, countries and indeed whole continents so diverse as that covered by this enormous generalization.[5] Whereas it may not be part of Burgess's conscious purpose to be suggesting a similar reservation about the notion of 'the East,' the *Trilogy* does seem to contain such an abundant variety of different uncategorizable individuals—all from diverse cultural backgrounds, often at hilarious odds with each other—that we may safely consider it to be one of the effects of reading the work, whether Burgess intended it or not.

One of the best foci of this odd, hilarious cultural diversity occurs about halfway through the first novel entitled "Time for a Tiger," and it is worth quoting at length to give not only the flavor of Burgess's writing, but also the comic effect of detachment from scene, epitomized here by the theatrical metaphor. Nabby Adams, an alcoholic, Urdu-speaking giant of a police inspector in the British Colonial police, with his Indian assistant Alladad Khan, is accompanying Victor Crabbe and his wife Fenella into the Malayan outback:

> 'I must get back,' said Crabbe. 'I'm working tomorrow.' They were sitting in a *kedai* on the single street of Gila, acting, it seemed, a sort of play for the entire population of the town and the nearest *kampong*. Their audience was uncritical and appreciative. Tiny smiling people squatted in rows before their wall-side table, and behind the squatters were others on chairs, and behind those the latecomers who had to stand. The play, after its opening scene, in which Nabby Adams had cracked his head smartly on a hanging oil-lamp, must seem to lack action, thought Crabbe. But the townsfolk and their neighbour villagers had little entertainment in their lives and, presumably, they had to be thankful for a brown man with a gun and a huge liverish rumbling man and a pale wet schoolmaster in sweaty whites and a rather tatty golden-haired goddess. Also there was no lack of sound off-stage. Cough, the dog, was shut up in the car yelling and whining, answered loudly by her own canine audience.
>
> Primitive drama being primarily religious, small brown smiling matrons kept bringing their infants to Fenella to be touched and blessed. Half-naked *orang darat*, their blowpipes sleeping at their sides, smoked strong local shag wrapped in dried leaves and watched and listened.
>
> 'I don't see how you can,' said Nabby Adams. 'You won't drive and I need him here to translate for me.'
>
> 'It's not a question of "won't drive",' said Crabbe

bitterly and with heat. 'There's just something in me that won't let me.'

'I don't fancy sleeping in a prison,' said Fenella. 'We ought to get back. Oh, why can't you drive, Victor?'

'Why do you need him here to translate for you?' said Crabbe nastily. 'Why don't you speak the bloody language yourself? You've been here long enough.'

'Why don't you drive a bloody car yourself?' asked Nabby Adams.

'That's a different thing.'

'Why is it?'

'Hush, hush,' said Fenella. 'Please don't quarrel.'

The audience, pleased with the rough and rapid passage of irritable language, smiled to each other. At the back some newcomers were being given a resume of the plot.

Alladad Khan, seated upstage, gave a lengthy speech. Nabby Adams gave one back. Finally he said, in English, 'He says he'll take you back and then get here himself again tomorrow morning. Although that's going to be a bloody nuisance.'

'Why is it?' asked Crabbe.

'What am I going to do, stuck out here on my own?'

'You've got the dog.'

'She's got no money. He has.'

'Here's ten dollars,' said Crabbe.

But Nabby Adams was not to be lonely after all. A new character entered, accompanied by little men wearing clothes and wrist-watches. He was brown and nearly bald and he greeted Nabby Adams in the English of a Cockney Jew.

'Hallo, chum. Still hitting it hard, eh?'

'It's Ranjit Singh,' said Nabby Adams. 'He looks after these here _Sakai_. Get a chair,' he invited.

'You mustn't call them _Sakai_, chum. They don't like it.' Ranjit Singh, now that his name had been announced, looked strangely beardless to the Crabbes. The clean shave and the naked bald head had a Black Mass quality. Ranjit Singh exhibited his apostasy to the whole world. His wife was a Eurasian Catholic, his children were at a convent school, he himself, abandoning the faith of the Sikhs, had become a devout agnostic. He held the post of Assistant Protector of Aborigines, and his task was to win the little men over to the true cause and to enlist their specialist jungle-skills in the fight against the terrorist. In fact they were incapable of being corrupted ideologically by the Communist, but they responded strongly to the more intelligible and sensible corruptions with which they were bribed and rewarded out of Government funds. They liked wrist-watches and Player's cigarettes; their wives took quickly to lipstick and brassieres. The ineluctable process which Crabbe was implementing in the class-room was spreading even to the core of the snaky, leechy jungle. The three little men found chairs, accepted beer and joined the play. The introduction of local talent did not, however, please the audience. They wanted the exotic and mythical. Murmurings

> and spittings of betel juice began to spread through the assembly. Still, they waited. Perhaps the play would end as it had begun—with the big man's cracking his head again and the awful rumble of unintelligible words.
>
> Ranjit Singh now took the desecrated host in the form of a cigarette. As the beer went round and the light thickened and the oil-lamp was lit, Crabbe saw the beginnings of a session burgeoning. He said:
>
> 'We must think about going, you know. It's a long way back.'
>
> 'Going?' said Ranjit Singh. 'You've got to stay and see the dancing, chum.'
>
> 'Dancing?' said Fenella.
>
> 'Oh, just a bit of a hop,' said Ranjit Singh. 'A bit of a party, really, because I've just got back here from Timah. Any excuse for a party. We'll have to get through a bit of jungle, though. On foot. A car's no good.'
>
> Fenella's first flush of *Golden Bough* enthusiasm was mitigated somewhat by this. But, still, aboriginal dancing....The monograph droned on: 'The culture-pattern of the *orang darat* is necessarily limited. The jungle houses them and feeds them and provides them with an anthropomorphic pantheon of the kind which is familiar to us from our observations of primitive life in the Congo, the Amazon and other centres where a rudimentary civilization seems to have been arrested at what may be termed the "Bamboo Level." Morality is simple, government patriarchal, and the practice of the arts confined to primitive and unhandy ornamentation of weapons and cooking utensils....In the dance, however, the *orang darat* has achieved a considerable standard of rhythmic complexity and a high order of agility...'
>
> One of the *orang darat* asked Fenella in courteous Malay if she would like some more beer. She came to, startled, and refused with equal courtesy.
>
> 'We must get back,' said Crabbe.
>
> 'But, darling,' said Fenella, 'we must see the dances, we must. We can travel all night, after all.'
>
> 'And Alladad Khan?'
>
> 'He can get back here by mid-morning. He won't mind.'
>
> The play came to an end. The characters took their bows. Nabby Adams cracked his head again on the hanging lamp. The audience was pleased and, gently, began to go home, chattering with animation, discussing, comparing...
>
> 'We ought to have taken the bloody hat round,' said Nabby Adams. (pp. 148-151)

This is a masterly summary of the forces of non-comprehension possibly at work in cross-cultural encounter—it devolves to the level of dumbshow. And from this flimsy evidence, Burgess implies, there may evolve the kind of academic gobbledegook which Fenella here begins to compose and with which we are all too familiar. If Burgess's intentions are serious (and despite the comic tone, one cannot but assume that they are) they are certainly not solemn, and we feel sure that Burgess would be highly amused by the endless discussion, analysis and academic dissection that some of his books have undergone on American campuses.

I have considered this relatively long passage first because it typifies the tone of Burgess's account of this somewhat strange cultural encounter. The light tone is more or less uniformly maintained, but it merges gradually, subtly—one feels almost reluctantly on Burgess's part—into moments of seriousness. It is as if the author does not want to take the concerns of his alter ego, Crabbe, seriously or admit that he himself might share them. Quite early in the first novel, Victor Crabbe is approached by a Chinese student who tells of the expulsion of another boy, Hamidin. Toong Cheong is described thus:

> Toong Cheong had been brought up a Methodist. His eyes narrowed in embarrassment behind serious thick spectacles. 'It is a delicate matter, sir. They say he was in house-boy's room with a woman. House-boy also was there with another woman. A prefect found them and reported to Headmaster, sir. Headmaster sent him home at once on midnight mail-train.' (p. 53)

As in _A Passage to India_, it is in the most delicate and dangerous of human affairs, the sexual encounter, that misunderstandings are most likely to occur.

The situation develops with Crabbe reflecting: "Expelled! The very word is like a bell." More like a bell with its assonance than the "forlorn" of Keats, but one feels that the use of quotation is forced, inappropriate—a kind of sophomoric showing-off of erudition, rather than a natural eruption of verbal exhuberance. At an earlier stage in the novel, Nabby Adams, in his overhung alcoholic remorse, had reflected: "God's most deep decree bitter would have him taste." An uncertain comic effect is achieved by this habit of quotation, in this case as in many others, of an esoteric quality. Nothing could be further from Nabby's horizons than the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, but here it has a punning quality when one considers the deep draughts of bitter beer that Nabby puts away. One so highly conscious of words, their sounds and accompanying puns, conundrums and _double-entendres_ cannot but intend such humorous undertones. But they do not ring entirely true. Unlike Shakespearean word-play (of which we know Burgess to be a professed admirer) this writer's word-games do not spring from an immediate perception of the situation as it is occurring, but from an overlay of sophisticated and, as I have said, often esoteric informaton and learning. The word-games frequently interrupt the narrative flow of a scene and indicate, again, I think, the curious reluctance Burgess seems to be feeling to become what he really, _au fond_, wishes to be—serious and compassionate. The expulsion of Hamidin is thus described by Toog Cheong:

> 'We wish you to tell Headmaster, sir, Hamidin wrongly expelled. Injustice, sir. He is a member of our form. We must stick by him.'
>
> Crabbe was touched. The form had welded itself into a single unity on this issue. Tamils, Bengalis, and one Sikh, the Malays, the one Eurasian, the Chinese had found a loyalty that transcended race. (p. 53)

Here is the Cultural Curry. But it has gone cold. These boys are growing up, with the exception of the indigenous Malays, away from their cultural origins in India, China and Europe. I prefer the metaphor of curry-making to Burgess's one of welding not only because it seems to me more accurately to represent the kind of incomplete cultural mingling that Burgess presents, but because it is an item of Malayan diet frequently mentioned. Fenella Crabbe on more than one occasion reminds her husband as she is trotting off to divert herself that there is some "cold curry in the fridge."

Sometimes, however, Crabbe and his wife go out together.

> Sometimes they would go to the cinema and, tortured by bugs, watch a long Hindustani film about Baghdad, magic horses that talked and flew, genies in bottles, swordplay, sundered love. Alladad Khan would translate the Hindustani into Malay and Nabby Adams, before he slept, would forget himself and translate the Hindustani into Urdu. Or perhaps they would go to see an American film and Fenella Crabbe would translate the American into Malay and Nabby Adams would, before he slept, translate what he understood of it into Urdu. (p. 129)

Burgess has cleverly got into this one paragraph a whole historical range of illusions resulting from inadequate East-West encounter. The Arabian nights, magic horses, genies and swordplay represent the whole complex of 'exotic, romantic' alien notions about the East which our grandfathers had as their excuse for either colonial oppression or healthy suspicion. And with the telling phrase "Nabby would translate what he understood" of the American film we have a subtle suggestion, I believe, of the misunderstanding that beset Western powers (in this case British and American) when they confront the East. And there we are, back again, willy nilly, with that phrase, 'the East,' a concept that Burgess implies is of dubious value. He nevertheless slips into using it himself occasionally:

> The East would always present that calm face of faint astonishment, unmoved at the anger, not understanding the bitterness. (p. 163)

Is this kind of comment authorial intervention on Burgess's part or does it represent the inner musings of one of his characters—in this case, Rivers? One suspects, and hopes, the latter, because the comment again partakes of that quality of generalization with which we have already seen Burgess so dissatisfied. At a later point in the first novel, this passage occurs, reminiscent of the opening words:

> 'And if you did say you know anything about it at all you'd be a bloody liar,' said Flaherty with a kind of epileptic vigour. 'See the world, man. Get out into the highways and byways. The East,' he waved and twisted his arms ceilingwards in snake-dance gestures, 'the bloody East. And this is no more the East than that bloody boot lying over there.' He pointed with a stiff shaking arm in a soap-box orator's denunciatory gesture. 'Now I know the East. I was in it. Palestine Police from the end of the war till we packed up.' (p. 173)

For Flaherty, the Palestine Police is the East. Again, the generalization, Burgess suggests, depends on your particular experience, and is therefore of limited application.

Burgess's point of view (if he may be said to possess anything so consistent and serious as a view) is often colored by his wry sense of humor. No better example of this satirical tendency to deflate solemnity could be found than his introduction of ideas about the I Ching:

> The Chinese shopkeeper and his family watched the stiff retreating form of Nabby Adams and the wagging rump of his dog. Then they looked again at the number, quacking with great excitement. Ostensibly Christian, they were all profound Taoists in fact, and what excited them now was an arrangement of nine numbers which could easily be resolved into the Magic Square:
>
> 4 9 2 3 5 7 8 1 6
>
> The Noah of China, Emperor Yu, walked along the banks of a tributary of the Yellow River one day after the Great Flood. He saw a tortoise rising from the river with a strange pattern on its back. Miraculously, this pattern resolved itself in his eyes into the Magic Square, the ideal arrangement of the yin-yang digits. Out of this came a plan for reconstructing the world and devising the perfect system of government. (p. 180)

This introduction of ideas solemnly examined ad nauseam by serious scholars as the background to a trivial gambling game suggests, I think, the misemphases we may make when considering an alien culture. The irony of it all is that, for all their feverish activity and cunning plotting to rid Nabby of the magical numbers, it is he who ends up with the winning ticket, the one which has been palmed off onto him! The first novel thus ends with another situation resulting from the operation of pure chance.

The opposite process to this (that is, an Oriental's misapprehension of certain aspects of Western culture) also occurs.

> Alladad Khan, his gun ready to aim, suddenly saw himself, Alladad Khan, in a film, his gun ready to aim. Ha! How far away she seemed, she and her squalling milky brat. Adventure. He heard the atmospheric music of the soundtrack. (p. 141)

Here is Eastern man's perception of himself being distorted by means of Western technology, and what he is escaping from is the reality of "his squalling, milky brat,"--his family's (and, by extension, presumably the country's) future.

What we have most commonly is not "fusion" (which had, at one point, been Victor Crabbe's solemnly stated ideal), but confusion--the cultural curry gone cold. Consider this:

> Crabbe looked at the 'No Spitting' notice on the wall

> and his head swam with the absurdity of four languages telling people not to spit, all on the same notice. A thin Chinese bathing girl beckoned from a calendar. From behind her, in the swimming open kitchen, came the noise of painful expectoration. (p. 139)

Here we have a comment on the non-communication of language and, perhaps, the ineffectiveness of government. It is not what is said that matters, not what effortful attempts are made at imposing order on chaos that count, but simply what always, chaotically, happens. The representatives of the various cultures do not communicate in any meaningful way and this may be because they are not _truly_ representative. This is, in fact, suggested at one point:

> The fact was that Victor Crabbe, after a mere six months in the Federation, had reached that position common among veteran expatriates--he saw that a white skin was an abnormality, and that the white man's ways were fundamentally eccentric. (p. 56)

An interesting comparison might be made here to Paul Scott's _Staying On_, in which the eccentric Smalleys are not wholly representative of the Western half of the East-West encounter in that book. But here, Burgess suggests, they can never be so. (Although, of course, the 'abnormality' notion begs a question: abnormal by the standards set by what?)

As the novel closes, we find these non-representative representatives carousing together:

> They drank, and the evening poured itself out in a long bubbling or frothing or aromatic stream, and Alladad Khan sang a Punjabi hunting song and addressed the Crabbes seriously in Urdu, and the Crabbes addressed Nabby Adams in Malay, and it became Whitsun more than Christmas, for the tower of Babel lay with the empty bottles. (p. 202)

Burgess has recourse here to a Biblical simile that more than adequately expresses his reaction to the kind of cultural mingling—the cold cultural curry--that we find here.

The second novel of the trilogy, "The Enemy in the Blanket," opens with Crabbe on his way to a new post as Head of Haji Ali College in the state of Dahaga. The Crabbes' arrival is one of the typical kinds of confusion Burgess delights in depicting. There is no one to meet them, but on their way to town in a trishaw they meet an old school friend of Crabbe's in a car. He is Rupert Hardman, an albino (or "a very white man" as Burgess describes him, heavily underlining the symbolic point) and when we learn of his situation we are again in the middle of cultural confusion. He is a lawyer with a failing practice who has recently embraced Catholicism, but who is considering relinquishing it to marry 'Che Normah, a wealthy and dominating Muslim widow. The impression of disorderly mixing is reinforced when we meet the man who has converted Hardman to Catholicism. Father Laforgue is a Catholic priest who is deeply attracted to the Confucian ethic which he studies assiduously in Chinese, having forgotten his native French—a Catholic Muslim and a Confucian Catholic before the book has hardly got under way and we haven't even met the natives yet!

This game of 'musical religions' may reflect Burgess's own experience. He was brought up as a Catholic, lost his religion (paradoxically, at the Catholic Xavier College, whose teaching brothers were losing their faith and encouraging the boys to question theirs) and at one point, after studying Chinese, considered becoming a Muslim!

> I've never been excited about the Chinese ideogram. I think it's been over-glamorized. That's what [Marshall] McLuhan is doing at the moment, over-glamorizing the ideogram. Frankly, I think the Chinese way of writing is a stupidly outmoded, insufficient technique. It would serve as a medium only for a totally non-auditory verse, a verse or pure ideas which couldn't be read aloud. I mean the only virtue of Chinese script is that it unites many dialects. I've seen Chinese of different provinces talking to each other and not making themselves understood. They either turned to English or wrote down everything they had to say in Chinese ideograms. Everyone can understand a Chinese newspaper, but if a man from the North and a man from the South start reading to one another, they're hitting two different languages. The unifying power of the ideogram is of great interest, of great value, but from the point of view of a writer who has always been troped to the auditory, Chinese has no appeal. The sounds of Chinese are different because there you use musical intonations to determine meaning, and this has always been tremendously interesting to me, but I was drawn more to the Islamic culture and the languages of Islam.[6]

Of this latter religion, Burgess has said: "You believe in one God. You say your prayers five times a day. You have a tremendous amount of freedom, sexual freedom; you can have four wives. The wife has a commensurate freedom. She can achieve divorce in the same way a man can."[7] However, Burgess himself, unlike Hardman, never made the switch and now describes himself as a "renegade Catholic," not having had the incentive of union, presumably, with a beguiling, sexually insatiable and wealthy 'Che Normah.

It is this character who introduces us most forcefully to what I have taken as the identifying metaphor for the *Trilogy*.

> Soon she brought to the door-step a plate of cold curried beef, fiery pepper-choked fibres, and forked it in delicately. Then, unaware of irony, she hummed 'One Fine Day' while picking her teeth. 'A man, a little man, is approaching across the *padang*." She did not know the words.
>
> Before twelve-thirty the court recessed. She saw her betrothed come out, talking to a white-suited Tamil, making forensic gestures, his brief under his arm. Then she saw him prepare to move off and then someone come on to the scene up left, and accost him gently.
>
> The storms began to stir in her eyes, for, despite everything, she was still a daughter of Islam, and the man that Rupert Hardman was talking to was just the man he should not be talking to. She banged her fist on the empty curry

> plate and it cracked in two. (p. 250)

It is a dramatic moment which Burgess conveniently makes appropriately symbolic.

It is in the second, central novel, too, that we have what I take to be a very significant encounter between the two white men, Crabbe (who here speaks first) and Hardman:

> 'But think of European architecture, and the art galleries, and London on a wet day, river fog, the country in autumn, pubs decorated for Christmas, book-shops, a live symphony orchestra...'
>
> 'The exiles' dream of home,' grinned Hardman. 'My dear Victor, what a sea-change. Is this our old ruthless dialectician, our hard-as-nails pillar of pure reason? You _must_ be getting fat, you know.'
>
> 'God,' thought Crabbe, 'I'm talking like Fenella. What devil made me do that?'
>
> 'There speaks the old Empire-builder,' said Hardman. 'You're a bit late, old man. You've only got to the third drama of the cycle. After the grubbing for Rhinegold come the thundering hoofs. And then Rhodes and Raffles, Siegfrieds in armour and bad verse. And always this ghastly "What do they know of England?" Why did you come out here?'
>
> 'I told you before,' said Crabbe wearily.
>
> 'I know. You spouted some nonsense about heliotropism and aplying for a job when you were tight. How about the metaphysical level, the level of ideas? I mean, knowing you, unless you've changed all that much...'
>
> 'Well,' Crabbe puffed at a cigarette that was damp with the night air, 'I suppose part of me thought that England was all television and strikes and nobody giving a damn about culture. I thought they needed me more out here.'
>
> 'They didn't need you. They needed somebody else, and only long enough to teach them how to manage a strike and erect a television transmitter. And that's not your line, Victor.' (p. 312)

Hardman, the "very white man," is here quite ruthless in pointing out the inadequacy of Crabbe's (and therefore, by extension, Burgess's) unpractical idealism. A sad conclusion to which, one supposes, Burgess might himself have come and which might account for the overlay of cynicism and irony. Crabbe (and again, Burgess, one feels) has the idealism and the opportunities to translate it into reality. His best hope is the ungainly, unsympathetic Chinese boy, Robert Loo, a dedicated composer—Crabbe fels he is a genius—all of whose talent is eventually wasted and dissipated by a chance ruinous encounter with the extremely beautiful but totally shallow Rosemary, a Eurasian girl who allows herself to be seduced by the boy while she is temporarily lamenting the loss of her lover, Joe. For her, it is a moment of dalliance: for him, naive, impressionable but immensely promising, it means the death of his talent. Any future musical creations of his are distorted by the shallow adolescent romanticism so clearly represented by the jukebox which Robert's father had previously placed in the family grocery store, and which had interrupted the young composer's creations. (Knowing Burgess's penchant for puns as one does, it is entirely possible that the name "Loo" has a punning quality. There is a suggestion, perhaps, that the talent and promise have been flushed away and lost down the tubes of the sanitary item which bears his name.)[8]

This sense of loss is no more manifest than in the final volume of the trilogy, "Beds in the East," in which Victor Crabbe meets his fate--a fate which had been foreseen as early as the first novel. The cultural divergence is too wide for there to be any possibility of fusion. Consider this:

> The driver of the trishaw reclined in the double wicker seat and watched them idly, picking his teeth. They had asked him to wait for an hour. One hour, two hours, three: it made no difference. He would milk the white man; he would ask him for two dollars for the double journey, and he would quite certainly, get it. The white man had more money than sense. Meanwhile it was pleasant to rest under the sun, its heat mitigated by the strong sea-wind, and bask in the knowledge that no more work need be done for at least a couple of days. Two dollars was a lot of money. (p. 370)
>
> Paid off in the house drive, the trishaw man gaped in incredulity at the single note. Five dollars! A whole week's holiday. The white man certainly had more money than sense. (p. 374)

Here the juxtaposition of Eastern and Western values makes the possibility of fusion impossible. Crabbe is unable to achieve his ideal. As Mr. Raj has prophesied in "Time for a Tiger," he is "swallowed up by the country," drowning, or being eaten by a crocodile (it is left unclear) in the river.

It is another sad conclusion, despite the riotous humor of the trilogy. And yet; one feels that somewhere, lurking beneath the cynical, impish exterior, there is a note of hope. Characteristically, it is hidden, cloaked again, beneath the game of quotation which we have seen Burgess playing. The title of the trilogy, The Long Day Wanes, is taken from Tennyson's "Ulysses." Here is the whole passage:

> The long day wanes; the slow moon climbs; the deep
> Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,
> 'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.

It is surprising that, amid the plethora of references the critics I have mentioned have spotted, they have not identified this. It is astonishingly apt. Quite apart from the obvious applicability of the first phrase to the waning of the long day of British colonialism, there is both the appropriateness of the "many voices" of Malay, Chinese, Tamil, Urdu and Eurasian in the trilogy and finally, and most significantly, I think, the intense optimism of the final line. One feels that, despite the detached, cynical, comic mask, it represents the true tone of Burgess's voice which we have noticed in those serious compassionate peepings-through of his involved, concerned humanity.

NOTES

1. Richard Mathews, *The Clockwork Universe of Anthony Burgess*, San Bernadino, California: the Borgo Press, 1978.
2. Geoffrey Aggeler, *Anthony Burgess--the Artist as Novelist*, University, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1979.
3. Anthony Burgess, *The Malayan Trilogy*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972 (1956, 1958, 1959). References are to this edition and pages given in the text. (Also published as *The Long Day Wanes*, New York: Norton, 1977.)
4. John Cadman, "The Novels of Anthony Burgess: An Introduction", *The Humanities*, Yokohama National University, II (22), October 1975, p. 22.
5. Alan Watts, *Psychotherapy--East and West*, New York: Random House, 1975.
6. In Aggeler, p. 10.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
8. This possibility (i.e. the particularly British punning on the slang for 'toilet') is made more likely by Burgess's penchant for satiric place names: Kuala Hantu ('ghost town'), Gila ('crazy'), Tahi Panas ('hot shit').
9. Interestingly, it is the defeated Robert Loo who provides a glimpse of a *possibly* promising future when he and the cinema-besotted delinquent, Syed Hassan, become the nucleus of a multi-racial teenage gang which even includes young English soldiers.

SOCIO-CULTURAL ASPECTS OF TWO SOUTH INDIAN NOVELS: R.K.Narayan's "The Painter of Signs" and Kannadhasan's "Civappukkal Mukkutti"

S. K. Jagadeswari

The socio-cultural study of how people of different nations live directly involves the study of literature as a great factor in constructing and transmitting cultural images. Writers can provide valuable insights into day-to-day activities and patterns of social organization, and how change is incorporated into a set mode of living.

I have selected two contemporary South Indian novels in order to show how they reveal particular aspects of Tamil custom and beliefs. The Painter of Signs (New York: Viking Press, 1976) by R. K. Narayan was written in English and published overseas before it appeared in India (Mysore: Indian Thought Publications, 1977). It is set in the fictional town of Malgudi, somewhere around Mysore. Civappukkal Mukkutti (Madras: 1977) is written in Tamil and its setting also centers around Tamil Nadu, Madras State. Its author, Kannadhasan, is best known as a lyric poet, but also has a number of novels to his credit.

A comparison of these two works seemed to hold promise of interesting similarities and differences relating to the following questions:

1. How does the language medium affect the depiction of socio-cultural elements?
2. What does the story reveal of the socio-cultural background?
3. How do the characters fit into the social structure?
4. Do the novels handle any conflicts and how do these involve philosophical or religious thought systems?
5. Are the novels in any way critical of social practices?
6. Is there any sense of justice and how does it emerge?
7. Is there any evidence of cross-cultural interaction?

II

In The Painter of Signs, the central character is Raman, a young man of about thirty who is a commercial artist. He lives with his widowed aunt who attends to his domestic wants by day and spends the evening at a nearby Ganesha temple listening to the pundits discourse on the Ramayana, Mahabharata and Bhagavatham. She and Raman are survivors of a train crash which killed his parents.

After some humorous and largely unsatisfactory encounters with his clients, Raman is introduced to Daisy. She wants him to make signs for the family planning clinic where she works. Raman is unused to dealing freely with a single woman and finds his passions being aroused. He avoids Daisy in an effort to control himself, but she visits his home with his wages and invites him to accompany her as signwriter on a family planning tour of surrounding villages. Obsessed with thoughts of marriage, he goes with her and after more misadventures refers to Daisy as his wife to a cartman carrying them home. Daisy is outraged and threatens to complain to the police.

Once again, Raman avoids Daisy, only to find that there has been no complaint and that she again comes to his home to give him his pay. He resumes his attentions to her and as the town gossips spread rumours about them he resolves that they must wed without parental support in 'Gandharva' marriage.

His aunt is very upset at Raman's news because she had been saving her money to go on pilgrimage to Kasi Banares. While respecting her wishes, Raman nonetheless continues to get the house ready for Daisy to come and stay. She, meanwhile, goes about her work unconcerned, and when approached by Raman declares that she will remain single and perhaps pursue her vocation in Africa.

As she leaves Malgudi, Raman reflects that they may be married in another _Janma_ rebirth, and he mounts his bicycle heading for the 'Boardless Hotel', his customary haunt.

III

I found Narayan to be a subtle narrator, feeding us bits of information here and there through the dialogue rather than telling the story directly. The arrangement of the novel, though, is relatively straightforward in that its characters and events are all built up around the central figure of Raman, the painter of signs, whose name, in fact, supplies the first word of the book.

Let me follow up some of the questions listed above to see how _The Painter of Signs_ presents conflict.

Raman meets a lawyer who wants a billboard to inaugurate his practice. The lawyer is guided by the dictates of the stars while Raman relies on his own professional sense of calligraphy:

> "Sir, listen to me. The letters on a lawyer's board must always stand up proudly, and not lie supine. Head erect."
>
> "You are going to be a lawyer, not a kerosene-merchant," said Raman.
>
> The other replied, undaunted, "I want the letters to be slanted, to the left—otherwise it will be no use to me."
>
> Raman's curiosity got the better of him, and he asked, "What makes you so firm?"
>
> "It's my astrologer again, who believes that a left slant is auspicious for my ruling star, which is Saturn."
>
> Raman was upset. All day long he was engaged in arguing with his old aunt who advised him to do this or that according to the stars. He was determined to establish the Age of Reason in the world. "I want a rational explanation for everything," he cried. "Otherwise my mind refuses to accept any statement." He was bursting with self-declarations. "I'm a rationalist, and I don't do anything unless I see some logic in it."

> The lawyer, born to controvert all statements, said, "What more logic do you want than that I'm paying for it? And I want it that way and the slanting letters to be shaded; that's all there is to it. What more do you want than that?"
>
> "That sounds pretty convincing," Raman cried, holding out his hand. "Don't forget that no money has passed yet, and the command is premature." The lawyer dramatically pulled out his purse and gave him a ten-rupee note.

Raman delivers the board at the auspicious hour and is fed two *idli* and weak coffee. The board had been drying by the river and some sand blew onto the paint. The lawyer protests: "What is this? Dirt? Am I to start my career with dirt on my name?" and Raman, to avoid ill-feeling and possessed by "a sudden sense of fair play", agrees to paint a fresh board. He is farewelled as an honoured guest with coconut and betel leaves and then realizes that he has not collected the balance of his fee.

Raman has another client, a bangle-seller, for whom he paints a "strictly cash" sign in glowing red. The merchant refuses to pay him unless he changes the color to blue: " 'Cash' is too red...It'll put people off." (p. 22) Raman takes back the board, thinking to sell it to another businessman but finds only one who deals in credit ("Shall I also add 'for credit' in green letters?") and who offends his aesthetic sense by suggesting that 'Cash' would also be better green.

Let us follow up a third conflict. Raman cycles past The Town Hall Professor—a local eccentric orator who sells inspirational messages for five *paisa*--who seizes on the board as a topic: " - 'Strictly Cash' - a message for the money-mad world. What is cash? What is strict?" Self-conscious at being the focus of public attention, and annoyed because he too has thoughts of transcending the cash economy, Raman retorts:

> "What's wrong with it? How can we live without cash? How can we? How?"
>
> He could hardly be heard. They kept commenting in a jumble, "Don't argue with the learned man. Are you wiser than he?"
>
> "He is also giving it not free, but only for cash," said Raman.
>
> "That's true," murmured a group in support of him.
>
> The Professor was nonplussed only for a moment, but said smartly, "This is just nominal. Five paisa for such a profound message!"
>
> "Why don't you hang this on this parapet?" asked Raman cynically.
>
> "Yes, why not?" said the Professor. He snatched it from Raman, leaned it against the fountain wall, and said, I'll take this as your payment." He held out the packet. "Take it home and follow the advice in it, you will be all the better for it. You will find a change in your life." The transaction was too far gone for Raman to withdraw his offer.

Another interesting conflict is Raman's efforts to control his passions:

> Living on the river, he occasionally entertained himself by watching the bathers, and was fairly accustomed to the sight of the human figure in the wet; but it always ended in self-criticism. He wanted to get away from sex thoughts, minimize their importance, just as he wished to reduce the importance of money. Money and sex, he reflected, obsessive thoughts, too much everywhere— literature, magazines, drama, or cinema deal with nothing but sex all the time, but the female figure, water-soaked, is enchanting.

Despite his irritation at his aunt's traditionalist outlook, he explains Daisy's allurement to himself in terms of the Hindu myths:

> Our puranas were full of instances of saints failing in the presence of beauty. The gods grew jealous of austere men and manoeuvred to disturb their rigours, and their purpose; their agency was always a woman of beauty. Now the same situation was presenting itself in the garb of a Daisy. He had determined to give sex its place, and somehow the gods didn't seem to like it. Having written signboards for so many years, it was rather strange that he should be presented with a female customer now, and that it should prove so troublesome. He was going to shield himself against this temptation. Mahatma Gandhi had advised one of his followers in a similar situation, "Walk with your eyes fixed on your toes during the day, and on the stars at night." He was going to do the same thing with this woman. He would not look at her eyes when he met her, nor involve himself in any conversation beyond the strictest business. That business part of it was most important. To deliver the board next week, and take more orders if it was satisfactory.

To carry out his resolve, he haggles for a pair of contraband sunglasses and dons them to deliver the signboard to the Family Planning clinic:

> The Hong Kong optician has excelled in his art, he thought. She looks terrible. This is even better than Gandhi's plan to keep one's mind pure. She seemed to grin, and looked like a demoness! Soorpanaka's approach should have had the same effect on Rama, he reflected, recollecting an episode from the Ramayana. Her teeth seemed to jut out and were uneven. He smiled to himself.

This self-discipline, however, backfires and leads to further complications in their relationship:

> She asked suddenly, "Why those glasses? Don't you find them a nuisance inside a room at this hour?"

> He had to find an explanation. "Some dust blew into my eyes—" he began to spin a yarn.
>
> "Does it bother?" she asked.
>
> "Slightly,"he said, without looking at her.
>
> She suddenly came over and pulled off the glasses, and stared into his eyes. This action was so sudden that Raman could hardly comprehend what had been happening until she was back in her seat and said, "I see nothing now. Perhaps you'll do well to give your eyes a wash. I have had some doctor's training, too, you know?"
>
> "Oh, how wonderful!" he said, "I'll come to you if I am in difficulty."
>
> She had not returned his glasses to him, but carried them with her, held them up against the light, waved them up and down and said, "Throw this thing away, the lenses are uneven and full of errors. You'll become squinteyed..."
>
> "It's from Hong Kong," he said by way of defence.
>
> "No wonder," she said, and he did not know what she meant.
>
> He lay tossing in bed that night. She had touched him, and that had sent his blood-pressure up so high that he had felt giddy, and her perfume had nearly stunned him. He had stolen a glance at her when she was fumbling with the glasses on his nose. But she stood so close that he could not see her clearly; still, many points about her personality were puzzling. He told himself, I must get over this obsession.

Such conflicts reveal something of the nature of day-to-day activities in a small South Indian town and its surrounding villages. Raman bathes in the river, women come to town to renew their bangles once a year, mango leaves are strung over a threshold for good fortune, food is eaten from banana leaves, goods are bartered for, business transactions are fluid, open-ended arrangements and everything is conducted (to Daisy's distress) before the eyes and comments of the ever-present crowd.

The motives and belief systems of characters emerge through dialogue and fuel conflict, and traditional Hindu thought acts as a basic cultural foundation for behavior, even in the case of a 'modern rationalist' like Raman. The lawyer is guided by astrologers; Raman's aunt reveals an unquestioning faith in traditional practices:

> She continued her narrative. "I was one of the several children in the house. It's not like these days when people are afraid of children. The house was full in those days. But nothing bothered anyone in those days—as long as there was a well-stocked granary and the bronze rice-pot was on the boil. My father was a priest and officiated at birthdays, funerals, and all kinds of religious functions and brought home his fee in the form of rice and vegetables and coconut and sugar-cane. Occasionally he also brought in a cow, which, as you know, when gifted to a brahmin helps a dead man's soul

> to ford a difficult river in the next world."
>
> "How?" questioned the rationalist.
>
> "Don't ask me all that," Aunt said. "That's what our shastras say, and we don't have to question it. It is the duty of the living to help the dead with proper rituals."

Daisy's campaign for population control is checked by a village yogi popularly credited with miraculous age and insight, who has constructed with his own hands a shrine on which Raman was to paint one of his family planning slogans:

> He had a loud-speaker voice and wore nothing more than a brown loin-cloth. "I built this temple and installed the Goddess of Plenty, long before anyone came here and built these houses. The Goddess came to me in a dream and commanded and I made it my mission in life. For a hundred miles around there is no temple like this. Barren women come and pray here for three days, and conceive within thirty days."
>
> Daisy looked shocked. This was going to prove the antithesis of all her mission, defeat her entire business in life.
>
> Raman's sense of irony was touched: "We will have to look for another place quickly. Let's leave."
>
> Before they could decide on it, the old man said in a trumpeting voice: "Our shastras say that the more children in a home, the more blessed it becomes. Do you want to dispute it?"
>
> Daisy, not having prepared herself for facing such a challenge, blinked uncertainly. Raman came to her rescue and said, "No, no, how can anyone dispute the shastras?"

Yet the society is also shown as being open to all kinds of contact with the modern secular and technological world. In the lawyer's house, Rama's feeble explanation of the sand in the paint is supported from an unexpected quarter:

> "What's stucco?" asked the lawyer challengingly.
>
> A hippie-like youth came out to explain, "Don't you know, uncle? Latest in architectural surfaces." He was a student of engineering.
>
> Bless your enlightened mind. May your side-burns flourish! thought Raman. Nodding a thanks to the fellow, "You look like Robert Louis Stevenson, Faraday, and a host of other celebrities to be seen only in our ancient schoolbooks."

and Malgudi itself is changing:

> His reverie ended when a policeman on traffic duty at the fountain blew his whistle and gestured to him to move on. When Raman failed to obey, he blew his whistle again and flourished his arms wildly. Raman felt, They won't

> leave one in peace. This is a jungle where other beasts are constantly on the prowl to attack and bite off a mouthful, if one is not careful. As if this were New York and I blocked the traffic on Broadway. He would not recognize it, but Malgudi was changing in 1972. It was the base for hydro-electric project somewhere on the Mempi Hills, and jeeps and lorries passed through the Market Road all day. The city had a new superintendent of police who was trying out new ideas. Policemen were posted every few yards. They seem to be excited at the spectacle of all this traffic, he thought, imagining that we are on the verge of disaster, I suppose, with pedestrians and vehicles bumping into each other.

The conflict between the new and the old is one of the central concerns of The Painter of Signs and is the source of much of Narayan's humor as well as satirical jibes at idiosyncrasies of South Indian life. Raman, for example develops the habit of outwardly condoning the status quo while inwardly criticizing it, or at least speculating on other possibilities. These range from small Lewis Carroll—like jokes about writing a 'nameless' board for The Boardless Hotel, "run by a man who capitalized on the fact that he had no name for his restaurant", to larger questions such as what would happen "if everyone adopted the boardless notion" and the feasibility of an economy that does without money (p. 13). In passing, Raman takes a pot-shot at local politics, international aid programs and corrupt business practices:

> They might engage him to inscribe gossip or blackmail on public walls; do it on the command of one and rub it off on the command of another. Sivanand, the municipal chairman, would provide enough material for all the blank walls of the city. His enemies could offer five rupees a line for writing, and Sivanand's supporters ten rupees for rubbing it off. A better medium than a scandal-sheet, less perishable. You could have a new item each day about this or that man, the renting of market stalls, the contract for that piece of roadmending, change of name in order to immortalize a visiting minister and gain his favor; and a thousand other sins. What about the American milk powder meant for the orphans of India and sold on the black market? What about the government hospital surgeon who flourished his knife like an assassin and made money and acquired the much-coveted building sites beyond the railway crossing! And that wholesale grain-merchant who cornered all the rationed articles and ran the co-operative stores meant for the poor? Raman would expose them to the world if someone paid him and provided him with a spacious wall, but ironically enough, he wrote sign-boards for most of them.

Of course, this raising of national issues is central to the plot of Narayan's story, which focusses on scientific family planning versus the love of children.

Narayan seems to be searching, through Raman, for some means of justice which functions both as a lofty general ideal and a personal human sense of fair play. Raman, however, appears not to have any deep sense of commitment to an ideology or code of conduct, and so it is hard to pin down the position of the book. Narayan, as a writer in English (who dislikes having his stories analyzed by graduate students) also hovers at the edges of the society he writes about and his attitude to the realities criticized in the book is also hard to determine. But we have an obligation as scholars to examine especially those works of literature that deal with social questions and we might wish that they fit in with economic, ethical and scientific principles in the service of social development.

IV

Civappukkal Mukkutti, as the title of the novel reveals, is a story woven around a nose ornament studded with rubies. This in itself is an interesting aspect of Tamil culture, as there have been many tales involving the miraculous powers of nose ornaments.

The story begins in the village of Thirukadaien in Tamil Nadu and moves to Madras, Ooty and Nilgiris. The characters are from the middle and upper-class sections of society.

Janaki, at sixteen, is a beautiful and clever girl who is much sought-after by local families as a wife for their sons. Her childhood, though happy, has been clouded by the desire of her grandmother for male children in the family. Janaki's marriage to Surantharan, a boy from Madras, is arranged and he gives her the mangalyam, or thali, a gold pendant signifying betrothal. His family also gives a diamond necklace. Janaki's parents are delighted, not being overly rich themselves, and the marriage is performed to everyone's satisfaction.

The same evening, the young couple return to Madras by train. They were teasing and joking with each other, happy to be together, when the train gave a sudden jolt and Janaki saw that the ruby from her mangalyam was missing. She is greatly upset, since the stone is a sacred symbol of marriage, and with her husband, carefully searches their compartment only to discover that it has probably dropped through some holes in the floor onto the tracks below. The train, meanwhile, has halted amidst some commotion and Surantharan learns that a baby has slipped from its mother's arms, fallen out and died. Janaki is extremely agitated by these two bad omens on the first day of her married life.

After three years, Janaki has had no child. She walks around the pipul tree as an act of faith and takes pills prescribed by the doctors, but to no avail. Her mother-in-law, who wants a son to inherit the family wealth, persuades the couple to go on pilgrimage to Kasi. Janaki is tormented by the thought that Surantharan's mother will arrange a second wife for her son and finally urges her husband to marry her sister, Vidahi. With a stubbornness born of depression and a sense of self-sacrifice, Janaki persuades her sister to agree and promises to keep out of the way, serving only as housekeeper. She secures her parent's approval and the marriage is celebrated.

A year passes and, accompanied by Janaki, Vidahi returns to her parents' house to have her child. A boy is born blind and dies a few days later. The two sisters sadly return to Madras and in the train find a poorly-clad woman with a thin baby crying for milk. Vidahi instinctively lifts the child and puts it to her own breast then gives it back to its mother who gives Janaki a ruby nose ornament and, asking her to wear it, leaves the carriage and never returns.

Janaki eventually gives birth to a girl and once again Vidahi loses her baby. On the return journey the sisters meet the woman again and Janaki returns the nose ring. The woman explains that it had belonged to her sister who died in childbirth and who had requested it to be given to anyone who had no child. This time she hands it to Vidahi.

Deprived of her own children, Vidahi becomes attached to Janaki's daughter, acting as its nurse. She fails to attend to Surantharan's wants and Janaki also does not oblige him much for fear of displeasing her sister. There is a great deal of tension and misunderstanding, and finally Surantharan accuses Janaki of having caused all these troubles by having him marry again. The sisters by this time are no longer living together harmoniously and so Janaki, seeing her daughter well cared for by Vidahi, concludes that her role in the family is complete and leaves.

Searches are fruitless, and after some years Surantharan and Vidahi go to Ooty to a clinic where she gives birth to a baby girl. The nurse who tells the news to Surantharan looks so much like Janaki that he follows her only to be disappointed. He muses on his first wife and seems to hear the call to name his new daughter after her. Vidahi also feels that Janaki is reborn in the child and the inner glow of the ruby nose ornament appears to confirm this.

V

One thing that is obvious in this story is its quick turn of events. Readers unfamiliar with the patterns of family life in India may also find the rapid succession of marriages unconvincing, and Janaki's selfless decision a little strange. The story however does provide many insights into South Indian beliefs and norms of conduct which put these events into their social context.

From the beginning there is a marked discrimination against girls. When Janaki is born, the mother-in-law does not even come near the mother after she learns the sex of the child. A girl is also a liability because the family normally has to provide her with a dowry. Janaki learns when she is sixteen that her grandmother refused medicine for her younger sister and thinks: "She too was a woman [the grandmother]. If a boy was born was he going to give her lots of wealth?" At the close of the story, though, we find Surantharan and Vidahi longing for a girl. This is due to the belief that the dead are reborn. Naming a child after a beloved dead relative is a custom of the region, so they wanted Janaki to be reborn to them in accordance with her parting words: "Those who are born are sure to die--Those who are dead are sure to be born." In this way we see discrimination corrected not by court decision or social action, but within the same traditional belief system.

Traditional modes of behavior are also illustrated in the pilgrimage to Kasi and Benares in order to be granted a wish. Janaki's departure to become a wanderer is no more out of place than the concept of marriage being primarily for procreation to maintain the family line. In fact, at the end of the story when Surantharan catches up with the nurse he is told there is no such person.

"But who are you?" he asks. "The world is still searching to know who I am" is the reply, which seems to place Janaki fully within the mythic and mystical tradition of South Indian stories. Sita, as the daughter of Janaka is also called Janaki so the tale has links with the Ramayana.

Interesting details and expressions can be found in Kannadhasan's novel which relate to social practices. The finer points of dowry negotiation are evident in the arrangement surrounding Janaki's marriage. Janaki refers to herself as having "grown on the shoulders of her father", thus capturing a characteristic family scene in which the mother tends to kitchen duties while the father walks the child up and down on his shoulders and suggesting also that her childhood was not without affection despite her being a girl.

Civappukkal Mukkutti is a more straightforward story than Narayan's but it obviously contains an implicit critique of the marriage and dowry system, and makes at least some indirect comments on the state of Indian railways. Otherwise, like Narayan, perhaps even more than him, Kannadhasan depicts a traditional Hindu society in which prayer is a constant source of strength and virtue has ultimate power. Both novels provide dramatized insights deep into the values and culture of South Indian life.

In conclusion, I should note that this is only a limited study of two prolific writers in the Tamil literary tradition, but that in accordance with this tradition I dedicate this humble venture to those immortal poets of Tamil Nadu, Subramanya Bharathi and Bharathi Dhasan.

[Editor's Note] News of Kannadhasan's death did not reach Hawaii until after this article had been completed. It should, therefore, be seen also as a tribute to Kannadhasan himself.

THE MORE WE READ:

Contact Literature and the Reader

Ronald L. Blaber

It is true to say that there are many ways to read a novel--Kipling's *Kim* can be read as an adventure story, as an examination of British Imperialism, and so on. It is also true to say that a second reading of a novel may be markedly different from the first. Why is this? The text remains the same, the marks and spaces on the page have not changed. These different readings must, therefore, be attributed to changes in the reader's perceptions of the novel. To answer the question 'Why has this perception changed?' it is appropriate to examine just what current literary theory makes of the novel.

In recent years, literary theorists have turned their attention towards the way readers read. A basic premise of their analysis is that reading is the reception of information as transmitted from the author through the text. For this to happen, of course, there has to be an information system, generally seen to be constructed on structuralist lines, that is, a series of oppositions or relations between signs providing units of meaning. But if there were only one information system, then there could only be one reading.

Yuri Lotman, a Soviet semiotician, argues that if the primary function of the novel--its social role--is to transmit information, there have to be numerous information systems within the text to explain varying reader responses. Lotman identifies two fundamental systems, although many information systems can be generated by interaction between the two: 1) information encoded by a 'primary modeling' system (by which he means a primary sign system) which is largely centred in language and literary technique (metaphor, trope, etc.): 2) information encoded by a 'secondary modeling' communication system, which is not directly manifest in the text, but encodes the extra-textual information--literature, myth, religion, philosophy, aesthetics. The secondary modeling system is culturally bound. Within the text these information systems converge to give a work its meaning:

> The greater the number of deciphering structures that one or another constructional bundle of the text simultaneously enters into, the more individual its meaning.[1]

If this model is to be accepted, then I believe it becomes clearer why we read in the way we do. The novel transmits a certain amount of information but not all the information is received. The reader fails to recognize certain information systems, although he may have the ability to decipher them, and thus he emphasizes others. This can change in a re-reading depending on the relevance of the information to the reader. Alternatively, the reader imposes a personal ideology that is another information system, on to the text, which results in a different interpretation. Lotman calls this 'internal' communication:

> Internal communication is constructed on the following scheme: given a text that is encoded in a certain system, another code is introduced and the

> text is transformed....an increase in information occurs in the text due to its interaction with the new code.[2]

To simplify (perhaps to oversimplify) Lotman suggests that there are three basic types of reader response:

a) the hearer's and transmitter's typological classification of texts coincide; the audience is generally inclined to believe that only one 'correct' typology exists.

b) The audience is indifferent toward the text's functional character in the transmitter's system and includes it in its own system.

c) The audience does not possess the author's classificatory system and tries to interpret the text in terms of its own typology. However, the audience becomes convinced of the unsoundness of its reading of the text by a system of trial and error and masters the author's system.[3]

As Ann Shukman points out, it is the third response that interests Lotman the most. In such a process the author's input dominates the interrelationship of author-text-reader.

> The perception of the artistic text is always a struggle between perceiver and author. Having perceived a certain part of the text the perceiver "makes a construction" of the whole. The next move by the author may confirm this guess and demand from the reader a new construction... and so on until the moment when the author, "victorious" over the previous literary experience, aesthetic norms and pre-supposition of the perceiver, imposes on him his own model of the world, his own understanding of the structure of reality.[4]

In contrast to Lotman, Umberto Eco believes that the reader dominates the author-text-reader relationship. In other words, Eco would favor Lotman's second type of literary response. Eco writes:

> the reader approaches a text from a personal ideological perspective, even when he is not aware of this, even when his ideological bias is only a highly simplified [system] of axiological oppositions. Since the reader is supposed to single out the elementary ideological structures of the text, this operation is overdetermined by his ideological subcodes.
>
> This means that not only the author of textual ideological structures is governed by the ideological bias of the reader but also that a given ideological background can help to discover or to ignore textual ideological structures.[5]

Both Lotman's and Eco's views on reader response have important implications for any discussion of contact literature. Lotman's application of his theories is primarily concerned with Russian literature. He is writing within a particular culture with specific primary and secondary modeling communication systems. Problems arise when one or both of these systems is transferred across cultures, that is to say, when a reader who is conditioned to one set of communication systems is introduced to another.

To backtrack a moment, it may be appropriate to ask what is a story, or what makes a story interesting, bearing in mind the story's cultural context. Livia Polanyi notes that "there are not an infinite number of 'interesting things' available to be talked about by members of a culture, but only a limited number of them—relatively few, highly complex and ambiguity-ridden concepts around which the social organization of a culture revolves and the emotional and intellectual energy of its members is largely spent."[6] Polanyi goes on to point out that "stories are built in large part around culturally salient material."[7]

If the 'things' that make stories interesting are culturally based or biased, then one might assume that interaction between a teller's information encoding system and the reader's decoding system depends on shared cultural knowledge--conscious or unconscious. The writer makes assumptions about shared understanding. But across cultures "these norms, these expected understandings of the way the world is, may well *not* be shared. A story told by an 'outsider' may thus fall flat if through his story the teller is appealing to a sense of common understanding which, in fact, is not present."[8] Robert Scholes argues that narrativity, "the process by which a perceiver actively constructs from the fictional data provided by any narrative medium,"[9] is culture bound. He further suggests that the nature of narrativity "is a matter of learned or acquired behaviour like the acquisition of a particular language."[10] Scholes appears to go beyond Polanyi's argument. Narrativity may be more than just concerned with different cultural semantic levels; it may be at the heart of the interaction between Lotman's primary and secondary modeling communication systems.

On another level, there is literature written by an 'insider' but written in a second language. In other words, information important in the secondary communication modeling system is encoded by an alien primary modeling communication system. Within Lotman's theory the primary modeling communication system dominates to the extent that it almost determines the secondary modeling communication system. Essentially, this is a variation of the Whorf-Sapir hypothesis. Therefore a writer writing in another language would perhaps unknowingly be trapped within alien cultural material. This notion has been highly contested, especially by African and Indian writers. Chinua Achebe stated that:

> My answer to the question "Can the African ever learn English well enough to be able to use it effectively in creative writing?" is certainly "yes". If on the other hand you ask: "Can he ever learn to use it like a native speaker?" I should say "I hope not." It is neither necessary nor desirable for him to be able to do so. The price a world language must be prepared to pay is submission to many different kinds of use.[11]

To understand Achebe's point, one only has to look at the difference in use of the English language to encode cultural material by native speakers—Australian, American, New Zealanders, Canadians—and the problems that arise in communication (or miscommunication). Achebe, arguing along similar lines, says:

> I feel the English language will be able to carry the weight of my experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings.[12]

Achebe's views have been echoed by K. S. Narayana Rao in "The Untranslated Translation and Aesthetic: Indian Fiction in English":

> The phrase untranslated translation implies an activity of expressing oneself in a foreign language while, in fact, doing the thinking in one's own mother tongue.
>
> Expressions in the original language acquire a new sense in English or what is perfectly sensible in one language becomes illogical when put in another.
>
> For the Indian writing in English the challenge [is] to bend it to suit the needs to convey Indian sensibility.[13]

Both Achebe and Narayana Rao recognize that there is a definite mis-match between linguistic and cultural information when a writer chooses to write in a second language. Both commentators suggest, however, that the writer's own secondary modeling communication system, to use Lotman's terminology, can transform the foreign primary modeling communication system to suit their cultural needs, but therein lies the problem for the native speaker. He is presented with what appears to be a text filled with information encoded by a familiar primary modeling communication system only to find that the secondary modeling communication system is unknown. For example, the use of names within literature often exploits cultural material—Jane Austen's Mr. Knightley in Emma conjures up chivalric overtones, or John Fowles' use of the names Ferdinand and Miranda in The Collector should bring The Tempest quickly to mind. If one assumes that names within all literatures serve as cultural and literary cues, then it might be assumed that such a function is lost across cultures.

As far as reading is concerned in such a situation, Lotman's second reading pattern and Eco's assessment of the process would appear to be most useful. The reader dominates the author-text-reader interaction. The reader brings to bear, consciously or subconsciously, his own ideologies and prejudices, interpreting the text to his own view of the world. Of course, if the reader takes the trouble to read outside of the text (to try to gain some information that forms the cultural background) then the balance might be redressed. It appears, therefore, that Achebe or Narayana Rao need not worry about English not being able to accommodate their own cultural needs, but they may find that readers whose only language is Standard English may not recognize cues to cultural material salient to the interpretation of the text.

This appears, however, to underestimate the educative properties of a text. The more one reads of a particular author or a literature from a particular cultural background, the more one's recognition of significant and cultural material should increase. Essentially, this reaffirms Lotman's third reading model, whereby the author ultimately persuades the reader to concur with his own meaning. Umberto Eco does share this view to some degree. He argues that the reader is conditioned by information he reads:

> every character (or situation) of a novel is immediately endowed with properties that the text does not directly manifest and that the reader has been 'programmed' to borrow from the treasury of intertextuality.[14]

As an example, when Bobby, in Naipaul's *In a Free State*, exclaims "The humiliation! The humiliation!" echoes of Kurtz's "The horror! The horror!" resound—assuming the reader is familiar with Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (or perhaps, these days, with Coppola's *Apocalypse Now!*)

However, if the reader's own ideology partly determines his interpretation of the text, then that ideology is going to determine his intertextual "programming". For most of us, this would amount to a reinforcement of cultural biases and thus lessen the cross-cultural experience offered by contact literature. But this does not appear to happen. If anything, the reader finds himself in a position somewhere between Lotman's and Eco's models: a position whereby the reader is confronted with his own cultural limits but remains aware of and sensitive to those of the writer. It seems inevitable that, in the field of contact literature, the more we read, the more we'll read. The experience becomes a point of *exchange*, rather than domination by reader or author.

NOTES

1. Y. Lotman, *Analysis of the Poetic Text*, (ed. and trans. D. Barton Johnson), Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1976, p. 123.
2. Y. Lotman, "Two Models of Communication" in *Soviet Semiotics* (ed. and trans. Daniel P. Lucid) Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977, p. 99-100. By comparison Lotman describes external communication in the following way: "External communication is constructed on the following scheme: given a code, a text is introduced that is encoded in the code's system, transmitted, and decoded. Ideally, the text coincides at entrance and exit; in practice, a decrease in information occurs."
3. Y. Lotman, "Problems in the Typology of Texts" in *Soviet Semiotics* (ed. and trans. Daniel P. Lucid) Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977, p. 122.
4. Ann Shukman, *Literature and Semiotics: A Study of the Writings of Yu. M. Lotman*, Amsterdam: North Holland Publishing Co., 1977, p. 133.
5. Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979, p. 22.
6. Livia Polanyi, "What Stories Can Tell Us about Their Teller's World," *Poetics Today*, 2(1981), p. 99.
7. Polanyi, p. 99.
8. Polanyi, p. 101.
9. Robert Scholes, "Narration and Narrativity in Film," in *Film Theory and Criticism*, (ed. Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen), New York: Oxford University Press, 1979, p. 421.
10. Scholes, p. 421.
11. Chinua Achebe, "The African Writer and the English Language," in *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, New York: Anchor Books, 1976, p. 82.
12. Achebe, p. 84.
13. K. S. Narayana Rao, "The Untranslated Translation and Aesthetic Consequences: Indian Fiction in English", in *Expression Communication and Experience* (ed. R. G. Popperwell) London: The Modern Humanities Research Association, 1973, pp. 160-2.
14. Eco, p. 21.

FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE:
U.S. Films on the International Scene

Ruth Vasey

From its outset, movie-making has had an international character. Because of the heavy financial investment involved in producing a movie, commercial film-makers have naturally sought the widest possible audience, and this has often meant trying to attract international customers, as well as utilizing talent from around the world. The production process too, has crossed many national boundaries. By the twenties, Ernst Lubitsch, Eric Von Stroheim, Greta Garbo and Emil Jannings were making movies in Hollywood, and by the thirties even Sergei Eisenstein was working for Paramount. This international trend continued into the sound era, so that, by the sixties, it would not have been unusual for a movie to be made in Spain by an American director based on a French novel with English, Italian and German stars financed by an international syndicate based in Switzerland. However, despite this international eclecticism in production, world film distribution has always been dominated by U. S. companies. Readily available capital for American productions and an aggressive world marketing approach by American distributors combined early in the history of the film medium to give the U. S. monopolies of distribution outlets in many countries beyond America's shores. In this paper I will briefly survey the history of the U. S. film commerce throughout the world.

In the late 1920s, films being distributed in Europe and Latin America were sixty to ninety percent Hollywood made, and this percentage would have been higher but for the fact that many countries imposed quotas and trade restrictions specifically designed to keep the U. S. films out. Even in the Soviet Union, where the revolutionary cinema was at its height, American films were being given wide circulation.[1]

The uncontrolled spread of American films had an ambiguous status even in the United States. Many Americans feared that the movies were creating a bad impression of their country, even though the films were popularly received overseas.

The following warning by William Seabury, written in 1930, is typical:

> Pictures, with a predominating theme glorifying war and which incidentally hold up to ridicule and disparagement race, religion and nationalistic attributes, are produced and exhibited in increasing numbers.
> Their inevitable effect is to stimulate racial and national dislikes which readily ripen into hatreds and ultimately lead to and encourage war, and since most of these and other undesirable pictures emanate from America they seriously impair American prestige abroad and stimulate world animosity and unfriendliness against America and everything American.[2]

Hollywood was indeed guilty of some gross insensitivity, and certainly of bad taste. Chinese people for instance, were constantly cast as thieves and villains, and then the pictures were blithely sent to China. When Douglas Fairbanks visited Shanghai in 1929, he was confronted with a host of protests about the misrepresentation of Chinese people in "The Thief of Bagdad." The China Weekly Review pointed out in 1930 that:

> It is generally conceded that the motion picture of today wields a great influence over the public mind, because it reaches people of every class and every race...[yet]...whenever a Chinese is portrayed on the screen he is depicted as a dope fiend, gambler, murderer, or something equally as bad.[3]

In one particularly sensational incident, when Harold Lloyd's Welcome Danger was playing in the Grand Theatre at Shanghai, a Chinese student returned from overseas rose from his seat and addressed the audience to the effect that the picture was anti-Chinese and therefore unfit for his countrymen to see. Prompted by this speech, a crowd of 350 strong rushed to the box office and demanded the return of their money.

The threat of a boycott eventually convinced the filmmakers to cease using Chinese villains; instead they used Mexican villains—and sent the films to Mexico!

At the same time, commissioners in India were complaining that the sensationalism of American movies was "proving a hindrance to amicable relations, because foreign audiences gain false and unfavorable impressions of the United States", and the New Zealand High Commissioner was branding 95% of the films shown in New Zealand as "cheap, trashy and harmful."[5] The Japanese were incensed when they were sent a film in which America, for no apparent reason, declares war on "Eurasia"--Eurasia being represented by Japanese actors.[6]

On the other hand, even while people were being offended, they were impressed by what they saw in the movies. Young people wanted to behave like the glamorous actors and actresses that they saw on the screen, and the high standard of material wealth that they were exposed to affected their values and priorities. The following is taken from The World Tomorrow in 1930:

> Films are now the missionaries of the trader. Films produce demands for his goods in all parts of the world. The drama of the new order is being written and directed on Hollywood Boulevard. Millions of feet of films! Millions of acclaiming eyes! Silk stockings, overstuffed furniture, floor lamps, clothing, automobiles, radios, telephones, tractors, canned fruits, musical instruments, and thousands of other manufactured articles are suggested to millions of people in all parts of the world. Theatre palaces in Cairo on the Nile, little movie houses in Gold Coast towns, theaters on Shanghai roof-gardens, weekly photo-plays in Y.M.C.A. buildings in Java, kinos in Munich, cinemas in Marseilles, Ceylon, Cape Town, Mexico City—hundreds of

> thousands of them dispense pictorial suggestions of goods available.
> Night after night American habits, ways, manners, and morals are paraded before a world audience.[7]

As far back as 1923, the London Daily Post commented:

> If the United States abolished its diplomatic and consular services, kept its ships in harbours and its tourists at home and retired from the world's markets, its citizens, its towns, its countryside, its roads, motor cars and counting houses would still be familiar to the uttermost corners of the world...The film is to America what the flag once was to Britain. By its means, Uncle Sam may hope some day, if he is not checked in time, to Americanize the world.[8]

Such fears were no doubt exacerbated by the U. S. Department of Commerce's adoption of the catchphrase, "Trade Follows the Films". In its session of 1925-26, this department appropriated a special fund for the creation of a motion picture section in the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce. It recognized the fact that the weekly display of a great number of commodities to over a billion people would create a desire for American-made goods, and, by inference, the American way of life. As one commentator of a slightly later period enthusiastically put it:

> American products. In the great majority of American films there is a very large number of American products, not only on display, as it were, but in actual demonstrated use. Scenes laid in American kitchens, for example, have probably done as much to acquaint the people of foreign lands with American electric refrigerators, electric washing machines, egg beaters, window screens, and so on, as any other medium.... what is engendered is not bitterness, but a desire to emulate. There has never been a more effective salesman for American products in foreign countries than the American motion picture.[9]

As an example of this influence, the Department of Commerce found in 1930 that the construction of the California-type bungalow and the outdoor swimming-pool in Brazil was brought about through people having seen them on the screen.

In the 1930s, articles appeared in journals in Britain, France and South America protesting the force of Americanization in the movies. In 1938, 220 million people throughout the world attended the cinema every week, and seventy percent of the films seen emanated from Hollywood. In this year, some 110,000 adoring fans greeted Mary Pickford at Tokyo Railway Station.

In 1945, the U. S. State Department published a report which called upon the movie industry to: (1) avoid more blatant forms of offense to foreign nations, and (2) develop an awareness of other peoples which would compliment them and stimulate friendly relations. The Department was concerned about reports from their foreign officers, such as one from Iran which claimed that, "unless some control is exercised over American commercial films, official efforts to maintain a cultural relations program are futile."10 Yet at the same time foreign film rentals were bringing in 75 million dollars each year. They would certainly have brought in much less if the horror and gangster films which the Iranians objected to had been eliminated. Furthermore, the movie industry was enjoying high favor with the State Department (as well as [illegible] Department of Commerce, the Justice Department and the Office of War Information) owing to the part it was playing in promoting American ideology abroad during the war. In particular, the Office of the Co-ordinator of Inter-American Affairs was creating important sympathy for U. S. objectives through the export of pro-U. S. films to South America.

According to the chief of the State Department's Telecommunications Division:

> American motion pictures as ambassadors of good-will—at no cost to the American taxpayer—interpret the American way of life to all the nations of the world.... The right kind of film can present a picture of this nation, its culture, its institutions, its methods of dealing with social problems and its people, which may be invaluable from the political, cultural and commercial point of view. On the other hand, the wrong kind of picture may have the opposite effect. Finally—and this is an important consideration—American motion pictures act as salesmen for American products, salesmen that are readily welcomed by their public.11

The government felt so strongly about these various points that the Justice Department issued a warning that it would oppose arrangements with foreign interests which might cause Hollywood to withdraw its films from any of the world's multiplying screens. The American Mercury of 1945 hailed the movies as a "ready-made, subtle and powerful weapon to spread the story of democracy and make friends for this country."12

However, not everyone agreed that this was what the movies were doing. Norman Cousins brought the matter to public attention with a series of editorials in the Saturday Review of Literature, in which he claimed that the movies provided anti-American propaganda more powerful than anything the Soviets could devise, and out-weighing the efforts of Voice of America, the American press, books, periodicals and radio. He claimed to be particularly concerned with the matter because:

> "No medium of communications or entertainment in the world exercises the power—actual or potential—of the motion picture. No medium can claim the attentions of as many millions of people for such uninterrupted periods of time each week or each month. And no medium is as effective in projecting America for foreign audiences."13

Cousins implored the movie industry to practise careful selection in choosing films to send abroad. In 1952 MGM did unveil a new, improved method of selecting films for foreign audiences—based *entirely* on box office results.

Throughout the fifties, the pattern of operation of the international industry altered radically. The impact of television depleted audiences, especially in Japan, Britain and Western Europe. The United States dropped from the largest film-maker in the world to fourth in 1959--behind Japan, India and Hong Kong. Furthermore, although in 1952 American movies had occupied from eighty to ninety percent of screen time on the overseas market, in 1959 this had dropped to 60% in England, 50% in Italy. 35% in France, and 30% in Germany. Nevertheless, the U. S. was still the largest exporter of films, and was mostly being ousted by domestic markets. The U. S. government maintained an intense interest in the industry and provided special economic incentives for certain prescribed pro-U. S. films to be shown in Turkey, Yugoslavia, Poland and Vietnam.

By 1964, the international exchange of politically sanctioned films was becoming more common. Peking signed an agreement with Havana for the exchange of feature films, to promote "cultural exchange and increase the friendship between the two peoples." China also distributed films in Africa, Hong Kong and Indonesia. Meanwhile, America was trying to set up a solid base for a West African film market. America was also investing heavily in the film industries of other countries. By 1969, 75% of new British pictures exhibited on the major theatre circuits were financed in whole or in part by American interests. The situation was similar in Italy and other major film producing countries. the implications for national cinema industries are far-reaching. In an article in *Cineaste* in 1972, Thomas Guback warns that:

> European film industries, by relying upon American investment, lose the chance of autonomy and with it the chance to be a force of national expressiveness. They inevitably gravitate, under the pressure of international finance, to making the kind of films which defy attribution to any national culture, rather than providing audiences access to the richness of each culture. An international trade in films becomes a hollow accomplishment indeed if those films say the same thing in the same way.[14]

In the 1980s film attendance runs at about nineteen billion per year in more than thirty different countries. Many of the films seen still originate from the U. S., which depends on the international market for about half its total feature-film revenues.

The "Americanizing" force of the movies has been recognized since the 1920s, both within America and in her foreign markets. Whether or not this force has been for good or ill has been a matter of hot dispute both at home and abroad. But the love-hate relationship between world audiences and American movies has not affected the demand for Hollywood-produced entertainment. The fact that Americanization through film continues to be a force in the daily life of people throughout the world suggests that it is high time that serious research be devoted to the questions of who is showing what to whom, and with what effect.

NOTES

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8. Herman H. Lowe, "Washington Discovers Hollywood," *American Mercury*, 60, April 1945, p. 409.

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13. Norman Cousins, "Do U. S. Movies Abroad Speak for America?" *Films in Review*, 1, March 1950, p. 9.

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AMERICA IN VIETNAM:
Some Literary Responses

Andrew James McCullough

No event has been more important in forging the consciousness of contemporary American society than the war in Vietnam. If, beforehand, it had been natural for Americans to visualize a world in which goodness and progress radiated indefinitely outward from their own shores, by the war's end a dramatic transformation had taken place. The civilization whose technological genius and economic resources had put a man on the moon was now reduced to pitifully boasting of its victory over a group of Cambodian irregulars in the *Mayaguez* incident. It was widely reported that the United States had lost its innocence, and it appeared to many that it had lost its moorings as well.

It is more than a little surprising that an event which traumatized American life for years and continues to haunt the nation's consciousness (if not its conscience) remains largely uncomprehended by most Americans. The dimensions of the defeat, and of the overall effect of American involvement in Vietnam, have hardly been hinted at in public discourse. We are frequently warned, it is true, to heed 'the lessons of Vietnam,' but these pleas invariably turn out to be calls for support for the writer's cause, whether liberation struggles or increased military spending.

American television networks are often credited with (or blamed for) turning Americans against the war, and so it is worth remembering that they provided neither the data nor an interpretative scheme which could make the war intelligible to the average citizen. Even after the publications of *The Pentagon Papers*, after the pattern of official prevarication had become part of the public record, the popular media failed to offer reportage and background material that might appear to give any interpretation of events. What they did communicate were images of death and destruction, in a tone that suggested the senselessness and futility of the entire enterprise. Occasionally, the transmission of statements such as "we had to destroy the village in order to save it" revealed the absurdity for all who could see it. Such imagery produced an instinctive revulsion, but left most Americans largely unenlightened concerning the causes and effects of the war.

It has frequently been the case throughout the life of the American nation that the dark, uncomfortable truths of our culture have first surfaced in the works of creative artists. The evidence of recent years suggests that the long moratorium on serious consideration of the war may be at an end. Belatedly, there have emerged a number of literary and quasi-literary works—works of journalism, biography, fiction, oral history and the cinema—that deal in thought-provoking ways with American participation in the Vietnam war. From this emerging literature, I have chosen four major examples for discussion—two novels and two films.

Why Are We In Vietnam?, Norman Mailer's inexplicably neglected major novel of 1966, cuts to the heart of America's Asian adventure despite the fact that its setting never leaves the North American continent.[1] The largest part of the narrative centers on a hunting expedition in Alaska's pristine Brooks Range. Its members are Texas corporate executive, Rusty Jethroe, his corporate flunkies, his teenage son, DJ, and DJ's friend, Tex Hyde. Mailer employs a staple theme of classic American literature (that of a journey into the wilderness to encounter undefiled nature) as a means of commenting on the war in Vietnam and the civilization that wages it.

Once the hunt begins, its most apparent feature is the immense technological firepower that the hunters bring to bear against their quarry. In deliberate contrast to the situation of rough equality between man and beast presented in a story such as William Faulkner's "The Bear", Mailer takes us on an excursion into the world of high-tech hunting. Helicopters, the omnipresent and seemingly omnipotent symbol of American military superiority in Vietnam, are used to airlift the hunters to desirable perches, and then to herd the animals back into their gunsights. This desecration of what we might consider the natural order is aggravated by the fact that many of the weapons blow huge, gaping "toilet plunger holes" in the animals.

By the use of such imagery, Mailer indicates that the hunt is to be seen as an extended metaphor for America's Vietnam involvement. In prosecuting the war, the United States employed its technological superiority in a way that not only obliterated the Vietnamese landscape, but simultaneously destroyed whatever possiblity existed for the emergence of heroism and nobility. For Mailer, the idea of war is not inherently reprehensible; indeed, he often employs the imagery of the battlefield in describing his own efforts to create an artistic and personal self. It is precisely because he can imagine a potential value for an individual in the testing fires of battle that he repudiates the war in Vietnam, which he regards as nothing but a technological holocaust. Mailer's inquiry into the root causes of the war lead him not into the realms of political ideology and geopolitical strategy, but into the inner recesses of the national psyche. We scorch the green earth of Vietnam, he seems to suggest, because we have surrendered our souls to the technological monster we have created. It is no accident that Rusty's corporate division is engaged in R & D for the space program, which Mailer elsewhere identifies as among the most alienating of contemporary enterprises.

Mailer's portrayal of the motivation of the hunters makes clear his belief that the old formula of lyrical celebration for man in nature no longer obtains. If Americans once journeyed into the wilderness to test themselves against its uncompromising exigencies, the hunters in this story are engaged in nothing more uplifting than corporate politicking. Rusty's flunkies, the "medium grade assholes," are placed in a particularly delicate (and unmanning) position: advancement hinges on the ability to outshine each other without overshadowing the boss. Rusty must perform well enough to maintain the loyalty of his subordinates and thus protect his own position in the pecking order. The bureaucratic structure of the big-business world demands a slavish concern for the opinion of others and a corresponding loss of contact with one's inner nature.

This thematic concern is reinforced by Mailer's success in creating an artistic form sufficiently complex to achieve his larger purposes. The novel is divided into a series of "Intro Beeps" and Chaps" narrated by D. J., the self-styled "disc jockey" to the "electrified mind" of America. The various noises that are literally "in the air" throughout the book are transmitted to us filtered through D.J.'s consciousness. His typical narrative style is characterized by the rapid-fire "patter" associated with radio, and the effect is one of chronic interruption. Whether he is engaged in high culture lit-crit speculation or in scatological word-play, D. J. refuses to pause and develop any of his observations. This "esthetic of interruption," a cultural concomitant of a high-technology society, has resulted in forms of communication, including art, in which sustained elaboration of themes is no longer considered necessary or desirable. Instead of inculcating an appreciation for subtlety and nuance, contemporary cultural forms encourage superficial comprehension and instant gratification. As the volume rises on the cacophony of voices in the American air, it becomes even more difficult to determine the value, or even the meaning, of any particular message; the electronic medium itself becomes the dominant cultural force.

Mailer brings these ideas into full focus in the novel's long climactic section. D. J. and Tex, ashamed of their own participation in the high-tech hunt, attempt atonement through a "purification ritual"—a hike into the wilderness without their weapons. As the boys alternately dodge the expedition's helicopters and the forest's carnivores, we notice a gradual stylistic change in the narrator's voice, from the high electronic intensity of the radio D. J. to a more descriptive, even lyrical, narrative style.

> ...and as the dark came down, a bull moose, that King Moose with antlers near to eight feet wide across all glory of spades and points, last moose of the North, came with his dewlap and his knobby knees and dumb red little eyes acros the snow to lick at salt on the other side of the pond, and sunlight in the blood of its dying caught him, lit him, left him guilded red on one side as he chomped at mud and salt, clodding and wads dumping from his mouth to plop back in water, like a camel foraging in a trough, deep in content, the full new moon now up before the sun was final and down silvering the other side of this King Moose up to the moon silhouettes of platinum on his antlers and hide. And the water was black, and moose dug from it and ate, and ate some more until the sun was gone and only the moon for light and the fire of the boys and he looked up and studied the fire some several hundred of feet away and gave a deep caw pulling in by some resonance of this grunt a herd of memories of animals at work and on the march and something gruff in the sharp wounded heart of things bleeding somewhere in the night, a sound somewhere in that voice in the North which spoke beneath all else to Ranald Jethroe Jellicoe Jethroe and his friend Gottfied (Son of Gutsy) "Texas" Hyde. They were alone like that with the moose still staring at them. And then the moose turned and crossed the bowl the other way and plodded through the moonlight along the ridges of snow, moonlight in his antlers, gloom on his steps. And the boys slept. (pp. 196-7)

At this point, the encounter with the wilderness seems to hold out the prospect of a kind of redemption from civilization's electronic excesses. Significantly, the next chapter is the only one in the novel that does not begin with an "Intro Beep"--we are now almost thoroughly removed from the atmosphere of perpetual electronic static. But in Mailer's vision of technologized American life, the ground for such a reconciliation no longer exists. In the final chapter, D. J. proves to be exactly what he has claimed to be throughout the novel—the "crystallization" of America's "electrified mind." Lying alone together at the top of the North American continent, D. J. and Tex are positioned to receive the unconscious wish fulfillments of the sleeping continent below. They become aware of a sexual tension in the air, which each mentally translates into a scenario of buggering and dominating the other. Just like Americans in Vietnam, Mailer seems to suggest, D. J. and Tex are frightened by something that threatens their sense of identity, and they respond by trying to obliterate it.

Mailer's use of the metaphor of crystallization suggests D. J. is finally fixed and incapable of the kind of dialectical movement that the author associates with vitality in individuals and cultures. After their aborted affection has destroyed the recently restored peace of the purification ceremony, the now "killer brothers" receive an unequivocal message from the beast-spirit of the North American night: "Go out and kill—fulfill my will, go and kill."

The title of this novel itself could be viewed as an example of the kind of empty sound that rattled around the popular culture of this period and so, in a sense, as a self-answering question. Still, Mailer does offer a serious and thought-provoking answer to his question, one that is related to his general theory of culture. In *Presidential Papers* he writes:

> As cultures die, they are stricken with the mute implacable rage of that humanity strangled within them. So long as it grows, a civilization depends upon the elaboration of meaning...as it dies, a civilization opens itself to the fury of those betrayed by its meaning, precisely because that meaning was not sufficiently true to offer a life adequately large. The aesthetic act shifts from the creation of meaning to the destruction of it.2

Surely, it is something like collective "mute implacable rage" that animates the command to "go and kill." Americans, unable to come to grips with their participation in the betrayal of their culture's best impulses, furiously displace their rage onto the landscape of Vietnam. The "destruction of meaning" is, of course, precisely the end toward which D. J.'s finely toned intelligence operates, and this aesthetic shift is paralleled by the massive destruction taking place in Vietnam. In Mailer's bleak view, the physical devastation of the Vietnamese landscape stands as a perfect symbol for the spiritual collapse of American culture.

In a more recent novel, Tim O'Brien sets out in pursuit of the answer to America's presence in Vietnam from the opposite end of the question. While Mailer focusses on the mentality of the culture that generated the war, O'Brien's Going After Cacciato offers us the perspective of the infantry "grunt" fighting it on the ground.3 But although its descriptive passages crackle with authenticity, Going After Cacciato is no mere chronicle of the Vietnam experience. Through his careful interweaving of three different time sequences--the picaresque pursuit of Cacciato, the grimly realistic close-ups of the actual war, and the "observation post" ruminations of Paul Berlin--O'Brien has fashioned an artistic form appropriate to the complex reality of his subject.

Cacciato (literally, 'the hunted' in Italian) is presented fom the outset of the novel as a disturbingly undefined presence within the infantry unit. "Open-faced and naive and plump, he lacked the fine detail, the refinements and final touches, that maturity ordinarily marks on a boy of seventeen years." When he walks away from his unit into the jungle, sparking off the chase that constitutes the novel's principal narrative line, the sense of his unreality is intensified. Periodically on the road to Paris (his previously announced destination) he mysteriously materializes in the midst of his pursuers, offering whatever aid they need to continue the chase. The gradual transformation of this spectral presence from quarry to guide is paralleled by the increasingly introspective nature of the journey, particularly in the consciousness of the novel's central character.

"Spec Four" Paul Berlin shares with his fellow soldiers the experience of confusion bordering on chaos that is their mode of being in Vietnam, but he is unique in the intensity of his need to make sense of their situation. Alone at his "Observation Post" in the middle of the Vietnamese night, facing a darkened sea that seems to symbolize the depths of his unknowingness, he begins a kind of imaginative reconstruction of the events of his wartime experience. His nocturnal reveries propel the novel in two different directions, each presented in a distinctive stylistic mode. Reaching back into the recent past, the history of their campaigns is rendered with a subtle but merciless realism. But Paul Berlin continually attempts to surmount the grimness of these facts with hopeful speculation. As the squad closes in on Cacciato in the novel's opening chapter, Berlin makes the ultimate effort in this direction:

> The possibilities were closing themselves out, and, though he tried, it was hard to see a happy end to it. Not impossible, of course. With skill and daring and luck, Cacciato might still slip away and cross the frontier mountains and be gone... Yes, it could be done. He imagined it. (p. 23)

And so, on one level, the pursuit of Cacciato is a desperate flight of fantasy from impending calamity. But like the soldiers departing the burned-out wreckage of Troy with wily Odysseus, the men of Paul Berlin's squad find the road home from war far from peaceful. Their leader is bewitched by a Circe-like character, they are nearly trampled to death by Buddhist monks, and they are forced to squeal that they are pigs by a brutal Savak officier in Iran:

> Things were out of control. Gone haywire. You could run, but you couldn't outrun the consequences of running. Not even in imagination. (p. 227)

The possibilities of peace are also crowded out of the narrative by the ever-intruding images of the "real" war: the technicolor nightmare that Paul Berlin has so recently experienced. (It emerges that he and his comrades have committed atrocities and conspired in the murder of their gung-ho leader.) Try as he might to distance himself in space and time from the battefield, its spirit remains with him. Berlin clings to an image of himself as a builder of houses and spends his days burning villages. The men of the squad remain connected to the war not only by the cursed mission they cling to, but by the unconfronted consequences of their deeds in Vietnam. The history of the squad is a roll-call of men who come into fully individuated focus only in the moment of each one's death. If the living "could not outrun the consequences of running," neither could the dead outrun the consequences of not running.

The novel offers a modicum of sympathetic consideration for the quandary of the American fighting man in Vietnam.

> Not knowing the language, they did not know the people. They did not know what the people loved or respected or feared or hated...They did not know religions or philosophies or theories of justice...He wanted them to understand, all of them, that he felt no hate. It was all a sad accident, he would have told them—chance, high-level politics, confusion...He was no tyrant, no pig, no Yankee killer. He was innocent. (pp. 263-5)

But although O'Brien (a former foot-soldier himself) sympathizes with this position, he is unwilling to condone the self-justifying ignorance of his central character. Paul Berlin may not be a "Yankee killer" at heart, but neither is he "innocent." Fleeing the war in his imagination, its spirit nonetheless pervades his pursuit of Cacciato. Even Sarkin Aung Wan, the refugee girl with whom he promises to live a peaceful life in the city of the peace-talks, finally despairs at his commitment to abstractions such as "duty" and "mission."

> She pulled her arm free. "Spec Four, you have the alternatives. It is time to choose."
>
> "But look, it's not realistic to just run off."
>
> "Realistic! Is it realistic to make our apartment into a military headquarters? To chase a poor simple boy... Is that realistic?"
>
> "But I promise-"
>
> "Oh, I know about promises," she said. "Spec Four, you are full of such promise. Promise and promise. Promise unending." (pp. 315-16)

Paul Berlin is a young man as divided as the city whose name he bears, and the idea of "going after Cacciato" ceases to be a way of leaving the war, becoming instead a metaphorical depiction of the absurdity and cruelty that characterized the hostilities in Vietnam.

It is left for Sarkin Aung Wan, the refugee whose experience of the war has been the most devasting, to pronounce, at O'Brien's version of the Paris peace talks, the final judgment on well-meaning Americans in Vietnam:

> "Spec Four Paul Berlin: I am asking for a break from violence. But I am also asking for a positive commitment...Give up this fruitless pursuit of Cacciato...It is one thing to speculate about what might be. It is quite another to act on behalf of our dreams, to treat them as objectives that are achievable and worth achieving. It is one thing to run from unhappiness; it is another to take action to realize those qualities of dignity and well-being that are the true standards of the human spirit." (p. 320)

There have been relatively few major film treatments of the Vietnam war, but it is arguably the case that those few have done much more to bring its complexities and dilemmas to a wide audience. Two of America's most gifted film directors have recently sparked off controversies, providing yet another indication of how far American society still has to travel on the road to understanding and assimilating the war's complexities.

Michael Cimino's *The Deer Hunter*, one of the most controversial American films of recent years tells the story of the war's devastating impact on the lives of people living in a small, ethnically homogeneous town in Western Pennsylvania. Three buddies from the town work in a steel mill together, drink together, and hunt together—now, they are about to go to Vietnam together. The opening scenes (certainly the most powerful and convincing in the film) vividly create the world inhabited by these men. We also observe their participation in two important ceremonial activities that define their way of life: a Russian Orthodox wedding and a deer hunt. The former is meant to suggest the sense of strength and purpose that inhabits a world in which rituals of 'rootedness' are retained; the latter functions as the film's central metaphor.

Cimino obviously intends that his deer-hunting heroes be seen as lineal descendants of Fenimore Cooper's *Deerslayer*. Michael, the natural and unquestioned leader of the group, is characterized by the aloofness and contempt for civilized life that we see in Cooper's Natty Bumppo. Lacking the trappings of civilization—wife, family, home, possessions, social graces—his facial expression of taut suspicion relaxes only in the wild. Although Michael works in a steel mill, Cimino demands that we see him as a modern-day incarnation of nature's nobleman, a believer in the idealistic creed that a deer must be killed with a single shot, or not at all.

The tension in Mailer's novel between civilization's technological imperative and the purity of the natural landscape is absent from *The Deer Hunter*, reflecting Cimino's more optimistic belief that the ability to encounter nature on its own terms remains a redemptive option for American society. The artistic problem for Cimino is to reconcile this optimistic world-view with the reality of American involvement in Vietnam.

It is at this point that *The Deer Hunter* seems inexplicably to retreat from its own basic insights. One might well expect to see dramatized a striking discontinuity between Michael's "one shot" creed and America's technological bombardment of Vietnam, with the consequent disillusionment of the protagonist. Instead, Cimino gives us a picture of heroic continuity: Michael is still nature's nobleman, living up to his own inner ideals despite the manifold provocations offered by his ignoble circumstances. If an historian had only this iflm to go on, he would conclude that Americans in Vietnam were a hopelessly outmanned minority who managed to survive only because of the physical and moral toughness embedded in their culture. The portrayals of the enemy are a strictly one-dimensional reprise of the "yellow peril" imagery characteristic of World War II propaganda films. When Michael and his friends are captured, their captors are presented as both sadistic and stupid: they force the hero-prisoners to play a kind of Russian roulette, then foolishly overload the gun, so that the Americans are able to escape.

It soons becomes apparent that, in Cimino's eyes, even the 'good' Vietnamese are a people of menace and treachery. As the setting moves from the battlefield to Saigon, it seems that everyone in South Vietnam is betting on a form of Russian roulette in which players pass the gun back and forth until it discharges. Nick (Michael's best friend) is fatally drawn into this web and, after years of implausibly defying the odds, he finally blows his brains out while Michael sits across the table.

These events are powerfully rendered in strictly cinematic terms, but it is difficult to discern in them any coherent meaning. What we are left with, then, is a grand metaphor that is not so much portentous as pretentious: one shot to kill a deer vs. one shot to blow one's life away. The very image of Russian roulette, suggesting a randonness of survival chances, actually undermines Cimino's garbled message. Michael, disparaged early in the film as a "control freak," has acquired, through the practice of mental discipline in hunting, the toughness that will enable him to survive in the fiery furnace of Vietnam. Nick, a poetical type who hunts because he loves the natural landscape, is fatally corrupted by the world around. Surely it is no accident that the one survives and the other does not.

Cimino seems to ask us to believe that it was the land and people of Vietnam that corrupted and finally destroyed virtuous and vulnerable young men like Nick. Vietnamese on both sides (lacking the innate American sense of honor and nobility), have turned their country into a living hell, and well-intentioned Americans have blundered in--this is Cimino's basic scenario. At the end of the film, when Mike has implausibly rescued Nick's body from the chaos of South Vietnam's defeat, Nick's friends gather and sing "God Bless America." Vietnam may have been a lost cause from the outset, Cimino seems to be saying, but for ethnic Americans like these--people whose lives seems to epitomize the traditional American values--it was also an arena of personal and national honor. This overlooks the contradictions inherent in the image Cimino is building upon. If the young men who went to war were as noble and naive as Natty Bumppo they quickly revealed the other side of their archetype, described by D. H. Lawrence as "hard, isolate, stoic and a killer."[4]

Cimino's depiction of the ethnic community is sensitive to the somewhat paradoxical fact that its celebration of ethnic distinctiveness actually serves as a ritualistic affirmation of American-ness. But this is nowhere to be found in his presentation of the Vietnamese. Cimino is curiously blind to the war's destruction of traditional Vietnamese culture through systematic techniques such as 'carpet' bombing and relocation centers. At the extreme, there is even a kind of cultural projection at work here: all of Cimino's Vietnamese can be seen as one form or another of the rugged individualist: from the sadistic killers at the prison camp to the mortality speculators of the Saigon gambling dens—the latter resemble nothing so much as crazed traders at the Commodities Exchange. In his initial focus on the American pattern of male camaraderie shading into male bonding, Cimino possessed a complex and subtle theme integrally related to the film's larger concerns and worthy of his great filmmaking skill. Unfortunately, his portrayal of Americans in Vietnam only adds to the glut of 'misinformation' in which American society is already wallowing.

Surely the most spectacular attempt to present the experience of Americans in Vietnam has been Francis Ford Coppola's film, "Apocalypse Now." Taking its basic narrative line from Joseph Conrad's classic story, Heart of Darkness, "Apocalypse Now" tells the story of an upriver journey through a landscape of increasing barbarity culminating in a realization of the "horror" at the heart of human experience. Conrad's story presents the mysterious Kurtz as an ivory trader, known for his sympathy to the natives, who is transformed into the ultimate imperialist for vague reasons that appear more spiritual than materialistic. Coppola's Colonel Kurtz, a Green Beret commander turned renegade, is also the product of a spiritual transformation: he has achieved a chilling clarity in his vision of warfare pursued without any of the restraints imposed by civilization. Although he is still at war with "the enemy," Kurtz has effectively seceded from the American chain of command. Consequently, Captain Willard, a burnt-out, hyped-up war junkie, is sent to terminate Kurtz's command "with extreme prejudice."

This somewhat pretentions structural device is more than redeemed by Coppola's success in creating the events of the journey upriver which constitute the heart of the film. In a series of long, fluid set pieces, various aspects of the war's underlying horror are brought into focus. In the first of these episodes, Col. Kilgore, the epitome of the crazed macho commander, leads a helicopter raid on an undefended Vietcong hideout. The ensuing technicolor slaughter, to the strains of Wagner blaring from the helicopters, is a devastating indictment of the soldier's swaggering bravado. Kilgore is a moral idiot, oblivious to the fact that he is murdering people—mostly women and children—unable to protect themselves. Lacking a moral calculus, he lives only for the sensual gratification that war brings: "I love the smell of napalm in the morning. It smells like victory."

The journey's next surrealistic episode depicts an erotic riverside USO show, in which the performers must be airlifted from the stage after it is stormed by U. S soldiers. Back on the river, the patrol boat ferrying Willard upstream stops a sampan to search it for weapons, and the chronically nervous crewmen open fire, killing all on board. Both episodes show the way a palpable tension increases to the point of frenzy with the subsequent disintegration of the very standards Americans claimed to be upholding in Vietnam. The absurdity and futility of the war are also commented upon, in what we might call "the battle of the bridge": each night the Vietcong blow up a bridge, and the Americans rebuild it the next day. It is, of course, night when Willard and company arrive, and chaos reigns. There are no officers in the vicinity, and the crazed combatants, filling the night air with mortar fire and screamed curses, seem more like teenage gang members defending their turf than a squad of disciplined soldiers. It is a tribute to Coppola's skill in creating a believable world out of these extreme images that the episode's patent parable-like quality does not detract from its credibility.

When Willard, having lost most of his crew along the way, finally reaches Kurtz's stronghold, the film's climactic confrontation fails to materialize. We have learned a good deal about Kurtz, and what we have learned leads us to expect an extraordinary character, a demigod. Here, screenwriter Coppola overreaches himself, grasping at philosophical straws to discover the roots of man's addiction to war and his modern decline. Kurtz may indeed have had a spiritual epiphany, but none of his pseudo-philosophical mumbling illuminates its essential nature. The strength of "Apocalypse Now" lies in its capturing the unique particularity, the very texture, of the war in Vietnam, and this is a triumph of imagery rather than of ideas.

Despite its unsatisfactory ending, "Apocalypse Now" deserves to be seen as an important artistic response to the complex situation of Americans in Vietnam. Coppola manages to recreate the texture of a freaked-out, psychedelic war without surrendering to the cult of amorality which usually attends that vision. The opening scene of the film, a visual tour de force, provides a key to what Coppola is able to accomplish throughout. The first image is of a benign, if not quite idyllic, palm jungle seen through a slight haze. Almost imperceptibly, a faint noise breaks the silence; indistinct helicopters flit across the screen and disappear. Then, in the instant of unconscious relief that this ominous intrusion has passed harmlessly, the entire jungle silently erupts in flames. This scene forces the viewer to experience, before moral judgments can be marshalled, the aesthetic beauty and the feeling of release produced by the spectacular conflagration. The film suggests that it is possible to get high on burning jungles, or on machinegunning civilians, or, like Kurtz, on the "purity" of killing without compunction, but Coppola does not condone any of these activities. It may be that "the war" has made these Americans crazy but in "Apocalypse Now" it is the Americans, with their technological arsenal, who have injected craziness into the war. Coppola acknowledges the seductive power of the apocalypse, for the observer as well as the participant, but his film forces us to realize that the price being paid for this "high" is morally unacceptable.

Among its many dubious distinctions, the war in Vietnam marked the debut of social and behavioral scientists as an integral part of the war effort. Bankrolled by fat grants from intelligence agencies, "value neutral" research organizations like the Rand Corporation ransacked the anthropological and sociological archives searching for aspects of the Vietnamese national character and culture that could be used to be further American war aims. Not surprisingly, none of these cross-cultural gems found their way into the national debate over Vietnam (unless we count pop-anthropological ideas such as "Asians value human life less highly than Americans"). In effect, Americans were being asked to make an intelligent decision without anything like adequate information.

Belatedly, an appreciation of the importance of cultural factors as an instrument of understanding rather than of war, is becoming part of our retrospective consideration of the Vietnam era. Each of the artists discussed above assumes the centrality of culture to any satisfactory explanation of why we were in Vietnam. Mailer and Cimino offer interesting interpretations of the pressures exerted by American culture on young men going off to war. Although their perspectives are fundamentally different, it is significant that they emphasize the same cultural factors, such as the relationship between man and nature and the relationship between the _macho_ mystique and an almost compulsive urge toward male bonding. In "Apocalypse Now," there is a hint that the exotic alienness of the Vietnamese landscape and civilization act as a provocation to mayhem for the rootless technological American. Tim O'Brien has gone some way toward introducing elements of Vietnamese culture into the discussion. Paul Berlin may lament his ignorance of the land and people, but O'Brien is all the while educating the reader in this area. Consider the following comments of the captor-captive Vietnamese soldier:

> "There is an ancient ideograph--the word _Xa_...._Xa_, it has many implications. but at heart it means that a man's spirit is in the land, where his ancestors rest and where the rice grows. The land is your enemy." (p. 86)

It is above all simple insights such as this that we must grow to appreciate if we are ever to comprehend the catastrophic experience of Americans in Vietnam.

NOTES

1. Norman Mailer, *Why Are We In Vietnam*? New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1967.
2. Norman Mailer, *Presidential Papers*, New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1963, p. 210.
3. Tim O'Brian, *Going After Cacciato*, New York: Delacorte Press, 1978.
4. D. H. Lawrence, *Studies In Classic American Literature*, New York: Viking Press, 1964.

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